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**Women Writers from the  
Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean at the  
Close of the Twentieth Century:  
En-gendering Caribbeanness**

**Odile Ferly**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the  
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts,  
Departments of French and Hispanic Studies, 08 March 2002.**

**(approximately 96530 words)**

## **Abstract**

In contrast to the usual division of Caribbean literary criticism into linguistic zones, this study adopts a pan-Caribbean approach. The contention is that women's writing challenges and revises many of the major regional identity discourses, most of which do not fully account for – or, in some cases, even allow – the shaping of female identity.

Each chapter therefore revolves around an aspect of collective or individual identity. Chapter one discusses female characterisation in the fiction of Gisèle Pineau (Guadeloupe, 1956), Ana Luz García Calzada (Cuba, 1944), Edwidge Danticat (Haiti/US, 1969), Julia Álvarez (Dominican Republic/US, 1951), and Mayra Santos (Puerto Rico, 1966), showing how these authors revise the representations commonly found in the androcentric literary canons of the region and offer alternative models crucial to the elaboration of a positive sense of identity for Caribbean women.

The interplay between Caribbean history and literature, and the erasure of women from Caribbean historiography and historical fiction are the issues addressed in chapter two. Here it is argued that conventional historiography does not allow for the representation of Caribbean women's participation in the nation-building process. Challenging conventional male writing, the fictional accounts offered by Pineau, Santos, Danticat, and Álvarez reinsert the female presence in the Caribbean past.

Chapter three is devoted to language in Caribbean societies and literature. It assesses the significance of gender in the creolisation process, and examines how gender affects the notion of 'nation language'. Here the focus is on the linguistic practices of Santos, Pineau, Sylviane Telchid (Guadeloupe, 1941), and García Calzada.

Chapter four is concerned with the response of several women writers to various identity discourses. It shows how Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie (Martinique, c. 1951) and Adelaida Fernández de Juan (Cuba, 1961), Danticat and Santos, and finally Marta Rojas (Cuba, c. 1925) and Telchid contribute to the renovation of the canon by revising, adapting or simply integrating these discourses.

Chapter five explores the treatment of exile and emigration in diaspora women's writing. It evaluates the significance of this experience in terms of a redefinition of (female) Caribbeanness in relation to the work of Dracius-Pinalie, Álvarez, Danticat, and Cristina García. It ends with a discussion of the implications of exile and emigration for the notions of Caribbean identity, culture and literature.

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*A ma mère,*

*Aux Antillaises et Antillais à travers le monde:*

*A quand l'abolition des frontières qui nous séparent davantage que la mer?*

*To the memory of Bridget Jones*

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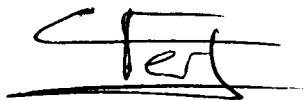
### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. J. Est', written over a horizontal line.

DATE: 11 July 2002

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## Foreword

### **Women Writers from the Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean at the Close of the Twentieth Century: En-gendering Caribbeanness**

Two considerations prompted this comparative study of women's writing from the Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean. The first is that criticism on Caribbean literature has conventionally restricted its scope to one linguistic area. Not only does this approach reproduce the colonial compartmentalisation of the region, but it also excludes the potentially fruitful exploration of the links created by a shared heritage of colonialism and slavery. Limitations of space made a selection necessary, and the Francophone and Hispanic islands have been chosen here because they are rarely brought together in critical literature in English. Hopefully, this limitation is partly remedied by the frequent comparisons with the Anglophone Caribbean. Unfortunately, references to the Dutch Antilles remain occasional.

The focus on women's writing stems from a second realisation: the sharp predominance of men in the literary canon across the region (except, perhaps, in Puerto Rico and to a lesser extent Guadeloupe). The more immediate concern of fiction with social issues explains the focus on this genre, which has also been particularly innovative in the region since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The authors to whom this

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<sup>1</sup> Michèle Praeger notes: 'Il semble donc que le roman, au sens où il est éminemment "social" [...] soit le genre le plus approprié pour rendre compte de l'antillanité. Comme l'écrivait un peu schématiquement Bakhtine, le roman est social, intertextuel, la poésie est individuelle' ('Figures de l'Antillanité dans les romans de Simone Schwarz-Bart', p. 123, *Symposium*, Summer 1992, USA: Heldref Publications, pp. 119-132). Many Caribbean writers, from Césaire, Guillén and Palés Matos

work is primarily devoted all belong to the generation of women writers that has emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s in the Francophone and Hispanic islands, labelled here 'the Generation of the 1990s'.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for centring on these writers were firstly the desire to bring to light writers of relatively little international renown, often overshadowed by the fame of some of their precursors (most of which are still publishing). It was judged necessary to pay attention to these younger authors, lest the silence around them should turn their foremothers (such as Lydia Cabrera, Aida Cartagena Portalatín, Marie Chauvet, Maryse Condé, Rosario Ferré, Dulce María Loynaz, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Ana Lydia Vega) into token figures, too exceptional to represent a female literary tradition. A focus on writers of the 1990s also made it possible to evaluate the impact of such predecessors and others on the elaboration of a female voice in Caribbean writing.

The female literary tradition in the region has largely developed in opposition to the theoretical and literary canons prescribed by male authors, which remain dominated by the question of identity. In addition, the Caribbean and its peoples have frequently been subjected to exogenous discourses, which local intellectuals have increasingly challenged since the 1920s. This study therefore draws on the international discourses of postcolonialism and feminism, but always in their Caribbean context. Postcolonialism has so far centred primarily on the former *British* empire, which does not always make it readily applicable to other (neo)-colonial areas. Similarly, since the means and ends of feminist activists and women writers in the Caribbean differ considerably from those of their counterparts in the West, this work is mainly concerned with New World feminism, in its Caribbean, Afro-American (Womanist) and Latin American variants. The primary focus, however, is on the major regional discourses, namely pan-Africanist ideologies (*indigénisme*, *negrismo*, *afrocubanismo* and *négritude*), the postcolonial thinking of Frantz Fanon and René Marqués, the pan-Caribbean views of Alejo Carpentier, René Depestre, Édouard Glissant, José Luis González, Maryse Condé, and Ana

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to Glissant, Brathwaite, Walcott and the 'dub' poets, have claimed their *antillanité* and expressed their social or ideological commitment through poetry. Nevertheless, direct social concerns are often more directly expressed in fiction. Mirta Yáñez also notes the popularity of fiction, and particularly short fiction, in Cuba from the 1950s (*Estatuas de sal: cuentistas cubanas contemporáneas. Panorama crítico (1959-1995)*, p. 33, ed. by Mirta Yáñez and Marilyn Bobes, Havana: UNIÓN, 1996, rpt. 1998), while the short story is by far the most successful genre in twentieth-century Puerto Rico. Poetry, on the other hand, is not very popular among Francophone women writers.

<sup>2</sup> These writers are not usually grouped under this label, which is that of the author.

Lydia Vega, and finally the Creolisation theories of Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Antonio Benítez Rojo. The contention is that women's writing challenges and revises many of these discourses, most of which do not fully account for – or, in some cases, even allow – the shaping of female identity in the region.

Because of the oppositional nature of women's writing in the Caribbean, it is important to understand the context in which this tradition has emerged: this information is provided in the introduction. After underlining the socio-cultural similarities between the Francophone and Hispanic Antilles, the introduction examines the emergence of a pan-Caribbean consciousness among intellectuals of the area, and then the parallels in the evolution of the Hispanic and Francophone literary traditions since the 1920s. It goes on to highlight the ongoing marginalisation of women's writing in the elaboration of the regional literary canon.

In order to reflect the oppositional nature of Caribbean women's writing as well as to situate the 'Generation of the 1990s' within the local female tradition, each chapter, revolving around an aspect of collective or individual identity, follows the same format: an introductory section situates the debate and outlines various positions on the issue in (largely) male writing up to the mid-1980s; a second section then reviews the responses to these positions given by female authors who have acted as precursors to the Generation of the 1990s, which explains the emphasis on pre-1990s texts; a final section is devoted to the analysis of selected texts by younger women writers. Because of the pan-Caribbean scope of this study, for the sake of representativeness a relatively broad sample of authors and texts was selected. This means that while various islands are represented by several authors, neither all authors nor even every island is represented in each chapter. The introductory sections of each chapter, providing a general discussion in the context of all islands, including those not represented in the corpus of the corresponding chapter, hopefully partly make up for the limitations imposed by such a selection.

Chapter one surveys the various images of women and the use of gender symbolism in early postcolonial writers. It then turns to female characterisation in the fiction of Gisèle Pineau (Guadeloupe, 1956), Ana Luz García Calzada (Cuba, 1944), Edwidge Danticat (Haiti/US, 1969), Julia Álvarez (Dominican Republic/US, 1951), and Mayra Santos (Puerto Rico, 1966), which revises those representations

and offers alternative models crucial to the elaboration of a positive sense of identity for Caribbean women.

History in Caribbean literature and the erasure of women from Caribbean historiography and historical fiction are the issues addressed in chapter two. Here it is argued that conventional historiography does not allow for the representation of Caribbean women's participation in the nation-building process. Challenging conventional male writing, the fictional accounts offered by Pineau, Santos, Danticat, and Álvarez reinsert the female presence in the Caribbean past.

Chapter three is devoted to the use of language in Caribbean societies and literature. It first focuses on the polemics aroused by the co-existence of English and Spanish in Puerto Rico, and the diglossic situation in the Francophone area. It then attempts to assess the significance of gender in the creolisation<sup>3</sup> process, both linguistic and more broadly cultural, and how gender may affect the response to the 'Caliban dilemma' and the linguistic predicament of diglossia in the form of the creation of a new, specifically Caribbean voice, sometimes involving the elaboration of a frontier language like Creolised French or Spanglish. Here the focus is on the linguistic practices of Santos, Pineau, Sylviane Telchid (Guadeloupe, 1941), and García Calzada.

Chapter four is concerned with the response of several women writers to the various identity discourses of pan-Africanism, the alienation of the colonised as described by René Marqués and Frantz Fanon, and pan-Caribbean theories. It shows how Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie (Martinique, c. 1951) and Adelaida Fernández de Juan (Cuba, 1961), Danticat and Santos, and finally Marta Rojas (Cuba, c. 1925) and Telchid contribute to the renovation of the canon and interrogate the very notion of Caribbean identity by revising, adapting or simply integrating these discourses.

Chapter five explores the treatment of exile and emigration in diaspora women's writing. It evaluates the significance of this experience in terms of a redefinition of (female) Caribbeanness in relation to the work of Dracius-Pinalie, Álvarez, Danticat, and Cristina García (Cuba/US, 1958). It ends with a discussion of the implications of exile and emigration for the notions of Caribbean identity, culture and literature.

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<sup>3</sup> This term is written throughout with a small 'c' to designate the socio-cultural process, and capitalised when referring to the theoretical discourses elaborated on this phenomenon.

## Introduction: For a Pan-Caribbean Approach to Women's Writing

### The emergence of a pan-Caribbean consciousness

The Caribbean is a geopolitical construct, the product of diverging and often competing imperialist enterprises, whose respective metropolises fashioned it according to their needs.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently it was Caribbean scholars and politicians who elaborated their own concept of the region as it suited their interests by including and/or excluding certain countries.<sup>2</sup> The delimitation of this area therefore varies with the geographic and socio-political factors taken into account.<sup>3</sup> As a working definition, the region may be understood as the island territories sharing the Caribbean Sea (the Antilles, strictly speaking) plus the small, scarcely populated country of Belize on the Caribbean Basin, as well as three territories with no Caribbean Coast at all: British Guyana, Suriname and French Guyana. However,

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<sup>1</sup> The artificiality of the make-up of the region is underlined by the common usage of the misnomer "West Indies" in English, inherited from Columbus's nautical mistake.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1960s, the pan-Caribbean historian Eric Williams, then President of Trinidad and Tobago, vehemently opposed the entry of Venezuela into CARICOM, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, while having no objection to the inclusion of British Guyana, Belize and Suriname. The main reason for Williams' move was obviously to protect the Trinidadian monopoly on oil production and distribution in the Caribbean market. Interestingly, though, *socio-cultural*, rather than economic factors prompted the other members to support Williams' view, for it was mainly the prospect of the incorporation of a predominantly white and *mestizo* country into a primarily black and mulatto union which led them to reject the application of Venezuela.

<sup>3</sup> Lulú Giménez reviews the various definitions of the region in *Caribe y América Latina*, Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallego (CELARG), 1990.

this study focuses on island territories of the Francophone<sup>4</sup> and Hispanic Caribbean, thereby excluding French Guyana.

These territories all share socio-economic features, namely: the absolute or near-absolute devastation of the pre-Columbian indigenous peoples, unlike elsewhere in the hemisphere; the imposition of a plantation (especially sugar) industry based on slavery, and the ensuing re-population of the region through the African slave trade, which, Giménez points out, occurred ‘desde el sur de los Estados Unidos hasta el norte del Uruguay’ (*Caribe y América Latina*, p. 94); and the syncretism between Amerindian, European, African, and finally Asian and Levantine cultural elements: what is specific to Caribbean societies compared to Latin America, is the restricted space in which this wide gamut of cultures cohabited.

Colonial policy was the main determinant of the make-up of each island on the historical, economic, and social levels. Perhaps this is most visible in the cases of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which share a single island but whose paths separated when France acquired the Western third of the territory from Spain in 1697, making the two countries very distinct. The English and French territories were very early on established as exploitation colonies, with large-scale slavery and relatively little metropolitan influx. Consequently, the African component predominates in the phenotype of the majority of their population. The successive British and French bans on the slave trade and abolition of slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century generated an influx of indentured labour, primarily from India and China. People of Indian descent have thus become the second largest ethnic group in these countries, estimated at a quarter to a third of the population in the French islands and reaching over half of the population in Trinidad and Commonwealth Guyana. By contrast, until the 1750s or later, the Spanish colonies remained settler societies that relied on an intense metropolitan immigration rarely outnumbered subsequently by the African slaves.<sup>5</sup> Except for the major cities, the black population tends to be geographically circumscribed to the areas where the plantations were established. Later influx to the Hispanic Caribbean originated from

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<sup>4</sup> A distinction is made between the French Caribbean, referring to Guadeloupe, French Guyana and Martinique, which remain dependent French territories, and the Francophone Caribbean, which also includes the Republic of Haiti.

<sup>5</sup> See Franklin Knight in *Process of Unity in Caribbean Society: Ideologies and Literature*, ed. by Ileana Rodriguez and Marc Zimmerman, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literatures, 1983, p. 65.



the Far East (mainly China, but also Korea and Japan) rather than South East Asia. Thus cultural syncretism gave different results in each Caribbean society, according to the various groups in presence and their respective proportion.

There are also important political differences within the archipelago, especially between the Hispanic and Francophone areas: these nations progressively took different paths in the course of the nineteenth century, culminating in the successive independences of Haiti (1804), the Dominican Republic (1844) and Cuba (1898), and ending for Puerto Rico with US annexation (1898), while Guadeloupe and Martinique were further integrated into France in 1946.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Cuba has undergone a Marxist Revolution under Castro since 1959. Thus if, as Beverley Ormerod notes<sup>7</sup>, the political ramification of *négritude* was the advocacy of decolonisation, by contrast with Francophone Africa, this goal was not achieved in the French Caribbean: quite the contrary, the 1946 *départementalisation*, a project first conceived and supported by the Martiniquan writer and politician Aimé Césaire, effectively tightened the links with the metropole and increased political and economic dependence. And yet Césaire has always favoured political autonomy. Puerto Rico followed a very similar evolution under Luis Muñoz Marín, a former independence supporter who became the founder of the *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA, a kind of US Commonwealth) in 1952. So in a Caribbean context, particularly in the smaller territories, nationalism can in some cases be divorced from the notion of independence. This may explain the evolution in literary trends in the *Départements d'Outre-Mer* (DOM), where the latest discourse, *créolité*, seems much less political than *négritude*, Fanon's thought and Glissant's *antillanité*: while Césaire, Fanon and Glissant were writing prior to and in the wake of the African decolonisation, a pro-independence discourse might seem unrealistic in the 1990s and beyond, since political and economic autonomy are hardly sustainable for the DOM, or for Puerto Rico.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these important differences, there remains a relative homogeneity of the area, largely derived from the legacy of the plantation system. Thus, except in

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<sup>6</sup> Most of the British territories only achieved independence four decades ago, some even later; the Dutch Antilles remain attached to the Netherlands.

<sup>7</sup> *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel*, London: Heinemann, 1985, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> The economic and even political state of many independent nations, especially Haiti, is hardly enviable, and many French Antilleans would rather sacrifice autonomy to material comfort. Similarly in Puerto Rico, many want to avoid the fate of their Dominican or Cuban neighbours.

Trinidad, whose oil supplies have allowed for considerable industrialisation since the 1960s, the area's economy is still largely based on tourism and on the production of export crops such as sugar, banana, tobacco and coffee, involving a dependence on consumer goods from the metropole in the past and often from North America in the post-decolonisation era. Such economic patterns persist even in more developed countries like Cuba, whose previous reliance on the USSR for oil and manufactured goods became evident after the fall of the Russian communist regime. Politically, a certain unity also prevails, when considering that the foreign and economic policies of most of the Caribbean states actually remain dictated by US expansionism, the most notorious illustrations in recent times being the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983, and Haiti in 1991. In the case of Cuba too, the US exerts indirect control through the blockade.<sup>9</sup>

But it is on the social level that the unity of the region is most patent. The whole Caribbean, including the Hispanic Antilles, was characterised by a social stratification along racial lines – with colonial administrators and white planters at the top, and black slaves at the bottom, while mulattos constituted the intermediary class. ‘Until very recent times’, Ormerod commented in 1985, ‘social mobility in the Caribbean was determined in large measure by lightness of complexion, although other factors such as parentage, education and economic situation also played their part’ (*An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel*, p. 13). At the start of the twenty-first century in Guadeloupe and Martinique, if skin colour as such no longer dictates privilege – in contrast to Haiti where it still largely determines social status – there remains a great deal of prestige attached to light complexion and straight hair. And this holds true in most of the Caribbean. Thus if the Haitianist Léon-François Hoffmann warns against ‘hasty analyses’ concerning ‘the “race problem” in Haiti’, and maintains that ‘seeking analogies between Haitian society and other societies, Caribbean or otherwise, would in all probability lead to erroneous conclusions’<sup>10</sup>, nevertheless, without denying the specificity of Haiti, the treatment of the racial issue in Haitian writers such as Edwidge Danticat can certainly be

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<sup>9</sup> Marc Zimmerman points to the consequences of US foreign and economic policy in the Caribbean (*Process of Unity*, ed. by I. Rodríguez and M. Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 34). The assembly plants set up in Haiti, for instance, have generated a mass rural exodus, with its social and cultural implications. The exportation of an American model (the so-called globalisation process) also affects the social and cultural evolution of the region.

<sup>10</sup> *Essays on Haitian Literature*, Washington DC: Three Continent Press, 1984, p. 66.

interpreted within the context of Fanon's analysis of Martinique, as will be shown in chapter four.

In revolutionary Cuba, despite the official claims that all social inequalities based on colour have been eradicated, there remain obvious discrepancies, and the integration of AfroCubans is only limited.<sup>11</sup> In the Dominican Republic, a great deal of stigma is attached to the population's African descent, to such an extent that the inhabitants, who for the most part are obviously not white, ascribe their brown colour to Taino origins.<sup>12</sup> Since it is a major feature that distinguishes them from their darker neighbours who once invaded and ruled them from 1822 to 1844, colour has also acquired political overtones: it has been used in anti-Haitian nationalistic rhetoric, culminating under Trujillo in the 1937 massacre of tens of thousands of Haitian cane-cutters working in the Dominican Republic. Although it no longer reaches such climaxes, the antagonism towards Haitians is still very much alive, and racism is one of its most obvious forms of manifestation.

In Puerto Rico, the African heritage of the island has been overlooked for a long time. Today, not only do the blacks remain largely marginalised socially and economically, but the official discourse continues to minimise their contribution to the overall society, when it does not simply deny their existence. After the brief episode of *negrismo* (1920s-1930s) best illustrated by Luis Palés Matos (whose representation of the Puerto Rican black remains problematic<sup>13</sup>), the blacks were made visible in literature only from the 1950s onwards, first with authors such as

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<sup>11</sup> On this highly contentious issue, see Carlos Moore, 'Le Peuple noir a-t-il sa place dans la révolution cubaine?', *Présence Africaine* 52 (1964), pp. 177-230, and 'Congo or Carabali?: Race Relations in Socialist Cuba', *Rethinking Cuba* [special issue], *Caribbean Review* 15.2 (1986), pp. 12-15, 43, where the author argues that the Cuban Revolution is racist. Depestre replied to Moore's first article in his 'Lettre de Cuba...' (*Présence Africaine* 56, 1965, pp. 105-142). Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs refute Carlos Moore's position in their *AfroCuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture* (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 1993), pp. 23-25. They claim: 'It is our contention that few countries can boast the advances made by Cuba since the Cuban Revolution in breaking down institutionalized racism. It would, however, be shortsighted to think that racism has been eliminated' (p. 7). Yet the under-representation of black people in prominent positions, whether in the political, military or even cultural sphere (where Nicolás Guillén, the poet of the Revolution, Nancy Morejón, president of Casa de las Américas, or even Roberto Zurbano at the UNEAC still remain tokens) is blatant. See also Robin Dale Moore, 'Nationalizing Blackness: *afrocubanismo* and artistic revolution in Havana, 1920-1935', Ph.D diss., Austin: The University of Texas, 1995, especially chapter one.

<sup>12</sup> Some would agree that the *prieto* (or black) candidate to the 1996 presidential elections Peña Gómez lost to his *trigueño* (or more racially mixed) opponent Leonel Hernández largely because of his colour.

<sup>13</sup> Emilio Bejel remarks that the ideological tenets of *negrismo* remain limited because 'Palés's ideas [...] are based upon a stylised definition of black culture' (*A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 1, ed. by A. James Arnold, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1994, p. 229).

José Luis González and Pedro Juan Soto. From the 1960s, the fiction of Luis Rafael Sánchez and later Ana Lidia Vega, among others, continued to present the black character as a constant of Puerto Rican society, while Isabelo Zenón's pioneering *Narciso descubre su trasero* took the debate on to the theoretical field.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless it was only in the 1980s, with José Luis González's seminal essay 'El país de cuatro pisos' (1979) that the cultural legacy of the blacks to the rest of the society began to be acknowledged, at least in intellectual circles.<sup>15</sup> This social reality, however, remains ignored by the media and by public opinion, as examined further in chapter four. The growing xenophobia towards the Dominican community in Puerto Rico is fuelled by racism, so that the discrimination pattern against the Haitians in the Dominican Republic is reproduced against Dominicans in Puerto Rico, and in turn against Puerto Ricans in the United States.

González contends in his essay that the cultural unity of the Caribbean largely rests on the legacy of African cultures, arguing that even in Puerto Rico, where the ratio of African slaves to white settlers was lower than in other colonies, it constitutes the foundation of popular culture:

Ya es un lugar común decir que esa cultura [the popular culture of Puerto Rico] tiene tres raíces históricas: la taína, la africana y la española. Lo que no es lugar común, sino todo lo contrario, es afirmar que de esas tres raíces, la más importante, por razones económicas y sociales, y en consecuencia culturales, es la africana (*El país de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos*, p. 19).

González adds: 'La cultura popular puertorriqueña, de carácter esencialmente afroantillano, nos hizo, durante los tres primeros siglos de nuestra historia pos-colombina, un pueblo caribeño más' (p. 22). This phase, when the blacks and their culture predominated, constitutes what the author calls the 'first floor' of Puerto Rico's socio-cultural development.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, he notes, the European element – reinforced in the second phase – fashioned the elite culture, and is what distinguishes the various Caribbean cultures from each other (and especially the

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<sup>14</sup> *Narciso descubre su trasero*, Humacao (Puerto Rico): Editorial Furidi, 1974.

<sup>15</sup> *El país de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos*, Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1989, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1980.

<sup>16</sup> The second floor González distinguishes was made up of three successive waves of European or Euro-American immigration: the Latin American white Creoles fleeing the aftermath of the continental independence struggles; the English, French, Dutch and Irish settlers arriving immediately after in 1815; and, from the 1850s, a mass immigration mostly originating from Corsica, Majorca and Catalonia. This second 'floor', González argues, had hardly cemented into a cohesive whole with the first by the time of the US invasion in 1898, the beginning of a new era that constitutes the third floor. The construction of the final floor, with the drastic socio-economic changes caused by agricultural reorganisation, industrialisation and the ensuing mass emigration towards the United States, began in the 1940s.

Hispanic islands from the rest). In an essay also written in 1979, Miguel Barnet expresses very similar views to González's on the role of the plantation in Cuban culture and the significance of the Afro-Caribbean element.<sup>17</sup>

On the historical level, intra-regional links and migration have further developed ties between the islands across the archipelago. For instance, the French, Haitian and Cuban revolutions have had a major impact on the area as a whole. Significantly, Haitian national heroes Boukman (d. 1791) and Henry Christophe (d. 1820) were originally from Jamaica and Grenada, and – as Marta Rojas reminds us in her novel *El columpio de Rey Spencer*<sup>18</sup>, discussed in chapter four – leading figures of the Cuban independence movement such as José Martí, Mariana Grajales and Ernesto Bavastro Cassard sought political asylum in Jamaica, while Puerto Rican independence supporter Eugenio María de Hostos chose to exile himself in the Dominican Republic where he impacted greatly on the intelligentsia.<sup>19</sup>

The Caribbean nations thus share a similar socio-cultural, and even political context, as will readily emerge from a cross-linguistic survey of the region.<sup>20</sup> Yet the linguistic diversity of the archipelago has generally played a divisive role in literary criticism. Many scholars would suggest that a cross-linguistic approach to Caribbean literature is futile. In Britain, the traditional fragmentation of literature on the Caribbean along linguistic lines illustrates this point: the Anglophone area stands as a separate category, when it is not subsumed under postcolonial or Commonwealth studies (with India, Pakistan, Anglophone Africa, etc.); the Francophone area is usually lumped with Francophone Africa; while the Hispanic region is generally considered a subdivision of Latin America.

Certainly, there are affinities between two regions like Francophone Africa and the Francophone Caribbean, whose bonding, inherited from the colonial experience, was strengthened during the *négritude* period. But there are also numerous and closer similarities between, say, Cuba and Haiti, both at a general and at a literary

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<sup>17</sup> 'La cultura que generó el azúcar', in *La fuente viva*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1998, pp. 244-250.

<sup>18</sup> Marta Rojas, *El columpio de Rey Spencer*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1996 (1<sup>st</sup> edition Santiago de Chile: Cuarto Propio, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> De Hostos is in fact buried in the Dominican pantheon, in accordance with his instructions that his body should not be brought back to Puerto Rico until the island is a free nation.

<sup>20</sup> This is particularly true of the Windward Islands, many of which switched numerous times between powers, especially the French and the British. Consequently, the Windward Islands share a vernacular, the French-based Creole, irrespective of their official language: English for Dominica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Grenada, and St. Lucia, and French for Guadeloupe and Martinique.

level, that have been left virtually unexplored by Caribbeanists. When considering that Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the same island, or that the French Caribbean and Puerto Rico share a very similar colonial reality, the validity of trans-linguistic comparisons seems even stronger. A subdivision along linguistic lines only perpetuates the established colonial pattern.<sup>21</sup>

Colonialism imposed a heavy interdependence between colony and colonial power, while discouraging any intra-regional connections, so that Lisa E. Davis pointed out in 1978:

[...] historically the various islands of the Caribbean have seldom conceived themselves as a geographical unit, with similar economic and social patterns. Any movement toward Pan-Caribbean consciousness and unification has, of necessity, to confront a colonial inheritance of diverse languages and a profound sense of insular isolation fostered by dependence on a variety of European powers, including the influence of the United States after 1898.<sup>22</sup>

Even today in the Caribbean there is still relatively little sense of a unity beyond the linguistic divisions. Thus whereas most Guadeloupeans travel to France, or to the US, fewer have ever been to Martinique, and fewer still know Anglophone Dominica, situated between Guadeloupe and Martinique. As the Barbadian writer George Lamming (1927-1996) once wrote, West Indianness is a concept born in the experience of emigration:

No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory. [...] In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England. The category West Indian, formerly understood as a geographical term, now assumes cultural significance (p. 214).

In this Lamming echoes Fanon (Martinique, 1925-1961), who writes in 1958:

[La] solidarité antillaise, inscrite dans les faits et ressentie par les Antillais les plus conscients est loin encore de se traduire dans la vie quotidienne et même dans la lutte d'émancipation: chacune devant d'abord adapter son effort à l'ennemi particulier qu'elle doit vaincre.<sup>23</sup>

And yet, as will be discussed in chapter four, there is a tradition of a cross-linguistic, intraregional migration dating back to the development of the sugar

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<sup>21</sup> V. Kutzinski argues that 'reading postcolonial Caribbean texts requires a vision and practice of comparative literature that simultaneously accounts for and resists imperialism's lingering sway' ('The Cult of Caliban', p. 286, in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 3, ed. by A. James Arnold, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1997, pp. 285-301).

<sup>22</sup> *Process of Unity*, ed. by I. Rodríguez and M. Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 1960, rpt. by Allison & Busby, London and New York, 1984; Frantz Fanon, 'Aux Antilles, naissance d'une nation?', 1958, p. 89, in *Pour la révolution africaine*, Paris: François Maspéro, 1961, pp. 87-94.

industry. Furthermore, several Caribbean intellectuals have been considering the idea of a unity running across linguistic borders since the nineteenth century. The emergence of first a nationalist and then a pan-Caribbean consciousness in the area was catalysed by US expansionism. Thus Cuba's post-1898 development can largely be interpreted as a response to US neo-imperialism, which is also true, to a lesser extent, of Haiti and the Dominican Republic since the 1915/1916 Occupation. Given the size of Caribbean countries, independence and nationalism go hand in hand with pan-Caribbeanism, as only a union of some kind (whether purely economic or more comprehensive) can guarantee a meaningful autonomy.

The idea of a *Confederación Antillana* was first promoted in Puerto Rico in the 1860s. After the failure of the Grito de Lares (the nationalist insurrection of 1868), one of its participants, the thinker and writer Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827-1898), came to the conclusion that the freedom of Puerto Rico and Cuba could only be obtained with the creation of a Confederation of the Greater Antilles across languages. His compatriot (Dominican by adoption) Eugenio María de Hostos (1839-1903) endorsed Betances's views, although restricting the Confederation to an association between the Hispanic Antilles.<sup>24</sup> Two contemporaries of these intellectuals, the Dominican General Máximo Gómez (1836-1905), who fought in the Cuban Ten Years' War (1868-1878), and the Cuban General Antonio Maceo (1845-1896), shared these ideals. Gómez wrote to Betances in a letter dated 30 November 1887: 'Llamo la patria, a Santo Domingo, Cuba y Puerto Rico'.<sup>25</sup> But the most famous heir of Betances and Hostos was undoubtedly José Martí (1853-1895): 'El Partido Revolucionario Cubano se constituye para lograr con los esfuerzos reunidos de todos los hombres de buena voluntad, la independencia absoluta de la Isla de Cuba, y fomentar y auxiliar la de Puerto Rico', he states in the first article of his 'Bases del Partido Revolucionario Cubano' (5 January 1892).<sup>26</sup> The Cuban poet certainly goes further than Hostos, and perhaps even Betances, in his conception of an Antillean Confederation: 'Para Martí la independencia de Cuba y Puerto Rico, su

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<sup>24</sup> Betances's and Hostos's Antillean Confederation is discussed at length by Carlos M. Rama in *La idea de la Federación Antillana en los independistas puertorriqueños del siglo XIX*, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Librería internacional, 1971. According to Rama: '[Betances es un] revolucionario práctico, mientras que Hostos vive inserto más en el campo teórico' (pp. 52-53).

<sup>25</sup> Quoted p. 120 by Hernán Venegas Delgado in 'La confederación antillana: realidad y esperanza', *Caribbean Studies* 27: 1-2, 1994 (Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras), pp. 118-127.

<sup>26</sup> *Política de Nuestra América*, ed. by José Aricó, Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1977, p. 226.

íntima relación con Santo Domingo, Haití y Jamaica, son los elementos que garantizarían un equilibrio en América e incluso en el orbe'.<sup>27</sup>

Still, all these visions of the Confederation were restricted to the Greater Antilles. Only in the twentieth century did a pan-Caribbean ideology encompassing the entire region begin to emerge. Following on from Betances and Hostos, the Puerto Rican nationalist poet José de Diego (1866-1918) conceived in 1915 the idea of the *Unión Antillana*, whose aim was to strengthen the relations between the islands of the region, with a view to a future political association within a Confederation. Here again, the Confederation is regarded as the only viable solution for Puerto Rican independence. Similarly, in 'Aux Antilles, naissance d'une nation?' Frantz Fanon regards the birth of the Federation of the West Indies as a triumph over British imperialism, and envisages the possibility of the whole region following the same path towards autonomy.

So the theory of pan-Caribbeanism seems deeper rooted in small, colonial islands whose political and economic independence relies on an association with their neighbours. Thus there are many supporters of pan-Caribbeanism in Puerto Rico,<sup>28</sup> including the writer Ana Lydia Vega (1946- ), whose second collection of short stories *Encancaranublado y otros cuentos de naufragio* is dedicated to 'la confederación caribeña del futuro' and discussed in chapter four.<sup>29</sup> A Caribbean Confederation would likewise benefit the autonomy of the French Caribbean, as reflected in the theoretical writings of Fanon and Glissant (Martinique, 1928- ), and the fiction of Condé (Guadeloupe, 1937- ), discussed in chapter four.

Yet the Caribbean Confederation has also been a major preoccupation of many Cuban intellectuals, who for over a century have witnessed US imperialist policy. Added to political and economic arguments was a growing awareness of the cultural continuity of the region, further supporting the idea of a unified Caribbean that

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<sup>27</sup> Venegas Delgado, p. 119. He also cites the Père Labat, who in the 1730s already saw the historical and cultural unity of the entire region: 'ustedes están todos juntos, en el mismo bote, navegando por el mismo incierto mar [...], la ciudadanía y la raza [...] son débiles concepciones si se comparan con el mensaje que mi espíritu me trae: aquel de la posición y de la condición que la Historia ha impuesto a ustedes...' (quoted p. 118).

<sup>28</sup> Although most contemporary intellectuals now focus on the continental connection (or, at worst, the bond to the US), the pan-Caribbeanist tradition nevertheless survives in essays by José Luis (Pinche) Menéndez and José Luis González, or in Ana Lydia Vega's writing. The university-based *Instituto de Estudios del Caribe* is also very active in developing links with the other islands and encouraging comparative studies.

<sup>29</sup> San Juan: Editorial Antillana, 1983. Not surprisingly, the collection won the 1982 Casa de las Américas Prize for fiction.



flourished in Cuba between the 1930s and 1950s, notably in the writing of Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989) and Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), whose ideas were taken up by their compatriots Roberto Fernández Retamar (1930- ), Antonio Benítez Rojo (1931- ), and Nancy Morejón (1944- ), among others, as well as by the Haitian René Depestre (1926- ), exiled in Cuba between 1959 and 1979. Thus while Guillén's poetry, especially *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), expresses concern over the growing US political and economic hegemony, it is also a tribute to the culture common to the region, namely the Afro-Caribbean legacy and the colonial inheritance.<sup>30</sup> As for Carpentier's novels, they evidence the continuous exchanges within the archipelago: the resonance of the Haitian Revolution is explored in *El reino de este mundo*, while the repercussions of the French Revolution on the whole region are examined in *El Siglo de las Luces*.<sup>31</sup>

The poet and historian Edward Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados, 1930- ) claims about Caribbean history that 'the unity is submarine', thus pointing to both the unity and diversity of the region. Bridget Jones shows how the notion of pan-Caribbeanism has always been central to Brathwaite's work as poet, editor of the review *Savacou*, and as historian.<sup>32</sup> Glissant interprets the Barbadian poet's phrase as an allusion to the African slaves who died at sea during the Middle Passage. These martyrs, according to Glissant, have formed submarine roots ('les racines de la Relation') that unite the people of the Caribbean, while maintaining their diversity: 'Nous vivons là, nous avons la chance de vivre, cette relativisation qui est participante, cette conjonction qui éloigne de l'uniformité' (*Le Discours antillais*, p. 134).

Depestre reiterates this idea of unity in diversity:

Il n'y a pas en Amérique-(latine) et dans la Caraïbe une conscience sociale et une sensibilité littéraire ou artistique, organiquement constituées en un seul bloc homogène, uniformément américain [...] On y voit plutôt une famille historiquement conformée de peuples et de cultures

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<sup>30</sup> See Nicolás Guillén *Obra poética: 1920-1972*, 2 vols., ed. by Angel Augier, Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1974.

<sup>31</sup> *El reino de este mundo* (1949, rpt. by Seix Barral, Barcelona, 1980) and *El Siglo de las Luces* (1962, rpt. by Cátedra, Madrid, 1989). The founding in the very year of 1959 of Casa de las Américas, an institution originally created to export the Cuban revolution to the rest of Latin America and whose role is now limited to promoting exchanges between Cuba, the rest of the Caribbean, and Latin America, indicates that for Cuba too, autonomy depends on regional support.

<sup>32</sup> Brathwaite's words are the concluding sentence of *Contradictory Omens* (Mona: Savacou Publications, 1974, p. 64). See Bridget Jones, '“The Unity is Submarine”: Aspects of a Pan-Caribbean Consciousness in the work of Kamau Brathwaite', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Stewart Brown, Bridgend (Wales): seren, 1995, pp. 86-100, and also Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1981, p. 134.

nationales. [...] Cependant, ces niveaux de différenciation et d'hétérogénéité n'ont pas détruit, pour autant, dans la Caraïbe insulaire et continentale, l'existence d'une très réelle communauté de civilisation.<sup>33</sup>

Antonio Benítez Rojo likewise invites us to view the Caribbean as the repetition of the same island, each time with a difference in *La isla que se repite*.<sup>34</sup>

Yet despite gaining ground in intellectual circles, pan-Caribbeanism long remained marginal to the concerns of the majority in the Francophone and Hispanic areas. In the former British colonies, however, pan-Caribbeanism had a wider appeal, as it became the official discourse promoting a social, political and economic unification, eventually achieved in 1958 with the Federation of the West Indies.<sup>35</sup> The Federation failed in 1962, but unity prevails in popular and higher cultures through the West Indian Cricket Team and the University of the West Indies (established in 1948), now numbering campuses in Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad, as well as associated colleges in Antigua and St Lucia.<sup>36</sup>

An economic union, CARICOM, succeeded the Federation in 1973. Yet only in 1995 was the first non-Anglophone country, Suriname, admitted into the organisation. Haiti joined in 1997, and the inclusion of Cuba, currently holding observer status, is under discussion. Thus, as Humberto García Muñiz notes, even though as early as 1956 Eric Williams stressed the importance of developing economic ties with the non-British Caribbean and from 1964 'promoted regional cooperation by approaching the Netherlands Antilles and Puerto Rico' (p. 8), CARICOM long limited itself to the ex-British colonies, thereby reproducing the colonial division of the area.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, a pan-Caribbean awareness is now well under way among its leaders. In this respect, CARICOM emulated another Caribbean institution, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which includes all

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<sup>33</sup> *Bonjour et adieu à la négritude*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980, pp. 125-126.

<sup>34</sup> *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna*, Hanover (NH): Ediciones del Norte, 1989.

<sup>35</sup> Yet the initiative of the Federation of the West Indies did not come from within, but from the British government, which virtually imposed it on its colonies as a condition for their independence.

<sup>36</sup> Another cultural manifestation is Carifesta, whose merits are, first, to ally popular and elite culture, and secondly, to be of truly pan-Caribbeanist dimension. This cultural event was first celebrated in 1972 in Guyana, then in 1976 (Jamaica), 1979 (Cuba), 1981 (Barbados), 1992 and 1995 (Trinidad & Tobago), and 2000 (St Kitts). Carifesta 1976, organised on the theme of the Caribbean hero, was attended by such illustrious intellectuals as Brathwaite, Césaire, Depestre, Fernández Retamar, Guillén, and Walcott.

<sup>37</sup> 'Geopolitics and Geohistory in Eric Williams' Discourse on Caribbean Integration', in *Before and After 1865: Essays in Politics and Education in the Caribbean*, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998; manuscript, p. 8.

the countries of the area, and whose aim is to unify the Caribbean Basin for cooperation among members and the defence of common interests.<sup>38</sup>

This pan-Caribbean consciousness is only slowly influencing literary criticism: if critical comparisons between the French and the English Caribbean literature have become increasingly popular over the past two decades, comparisons between the Hispanic and Francophone regions remain rare, and even rarer are the comparisons involving all the linguistic areas. Pioneering in this respect is Arnold's three volume *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*.<sup>39</sup> Yet the first two volumes are divided by linguistic area, and the essays included are largely overviews, while the bridges established in the third volume often remain limited to the Anglophone and Francophone areas. Nevertheless, the increasing publication of comparative studies since the mid-1990s (notably J. Michael Dash's *The Other America*, which still focuses on the Francophone and Anglophone areas) indicates that the traditional subdivision of the area into linguistic zones is finally being questioned.<sup>40</sup>

The development of truly pan-Caribbean perspectives could only benefit the literature of the area.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the linguistic fragmentation of the Caribbean

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<sup>38</sup> Despite these unions, there is not always unanimity among the leaders: one of the chief debates remains whether to adopt a pan-Caribbeanist or a US-orientated policy.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold's three-volume *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (Hispanic and Francophone regions, 1994, English- and Dutch-Speaking regions, forthcoming, and *Cross-Cultural Studies*, 1997), is the first study of that magnitude looking at the whole area.

<sup>40</sup> *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*, Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Some other pan-Caribbean works include: Henri Bangou's *René Depestre y George Lamming, Influencia del África en las literaturas antillanas* (Montevideo: ILAC/1, 1972); Pamela Mordecai and Elizabeth Wilson's anthology of women's writing *Her True True Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing from the Caribbean* (London: Heinemann International, 1989), which actually covers Caribbean literature in English, French and Spanish, although the presence of the latter is minimal; Selwyn Cudjoe's *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (Wellesley, Mass.: Calaloux Publications, 1990), which limits the discussion of the non-Anglophone area to one overview for each sub-zone, but has the merit of including Dutch Antillean literature; and Erika J. Waters' *New Writing from the Caribbean* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994). Although the first section of Benítez Rojo's *La isla que se repite* examines sociological characteristics in the whole Caribbean, the literary criticism again centres on one area, the Hispanic Caribbean (with the exception of the comparative study of the Guyanese Wilson Harris and the Cuban Alejo Carpentier). Carole Boyce-Davies and Elaine Savory Fido's *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990) and Joan Anim-Addo's *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing* (London: Whiting & Birch, 1996) still centre on the Commonwealth area, but they are much more comprehensive in their approach, particularly the former; in both works, however, the connection with the Francophone area is the one best explored. The special *Matatu* issue *Caribbean Writers Between Orality and Writing* (No. 12, 1994, ed. by Marlies Glaser and Marion Pausch) compares the Anglophone and Francophone regions. As noted before, there are often closer social and historical similarities between the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean than with the Hispanic region, which certainly explains why critics have felt more comfortable at comparing the former two. Nevertheless, there are some notable exceptions, such as G.C. Coulthard's *Raza y color en la literatura antillana* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios

intensifies the problems of a limited readership, since only the most successful texts are translated, and the translations are not often easily accessible.<sup>42</sup> For St. Lucian writers possibly interested in a Martiniquan readership, for instance, this absence of translations rules out a potential market. It also makes it difficult for non-polyglots to keep informed and up to date with the regional literary trends: in this respect, writing from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles has long been isolated from the neighbouring literatures. Brathwaite thus admits that until quite late in his literary formation his sole masters were English poets, while he remained unaware of the existence of the most prominent French Antillean poet, Césaire, until the 1950s. Similarly, the Martiniquan Patrick Chamoiseau has expressed his regret that, despite the existence of Pan-Caribbean literary prizes such as the Premio Casa de las Américas, awarded yearly in Havana since 1960, and the Prix Carbet, there is little exchange between writers from different islands of the Caribbean. He himself only started to exchange opinions with the Trinidadian Earl Lovelace, whose linguistic project with English is comparable to his own with French, in the early 1990s.<sup>43</sup> St. Lucian Derek Walcott likewise claims to have discovered Chamoiseau after he received the Goncourt Prize for his third novel, *Texaco*.

Linguistic diversity has therefore increased literary insularity, perhaps in this field more than any other.<sup>44</sup> Yet linguistic pluralism can also be the source of extreme literary wealth and diversity, as it broadens the possible external sources to draw upon: the Latin American canon, black US literature, as well as worldwide Francophone and Anglophone writing.<sup>45</sup> As the next section shows, despite limited

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Hispano-Americanos, 1958), Martha Cobb's *Harlem, Haiti and Havana* (Washington DC: Three Continents Press, 1979), a pioneering comparative study of Langston Hughes, Jacques Roumain and Nicolás Guillén, and Ileana Rodríguez's *Process of Unity in Caribbean Society*. Despite dealing with the whole of the Black Diaspora, Filomina Chioma Steady's *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Books, 1983) and Mineke Schipper's *Unheard Words: Women and Literature in Africa, the Arab World, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America* (London: Allison & Busby, 1985) both include sections on all of the Caribbean. *Littératures caribéennes comparées* by Colette Maximin (Pointe-à-Pitre/Paris: Jasor/Karthala, 1996) breaks new ground in its examination of the region's literature in English, French and Spanish.

<sup>42</sup> As Bridget Jones once pointed out to me in an informal conversation back in April 1997: 'On ne lit pas beaucoup aux Antilles'. Condé is much more categorical: she claims that 'le peuple antillais ne lit pas' (Françoise Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé*, Paris: Karthala, 1993, p. 61).

<sup>43</sup> Marion Pausch, 'Exprimer la complexité antillaise à l'aide de la tradition orale': Interview with Patrick Chamoiseau', pp. 155-156, in *Caribbean Writers: Between Orality and Culture* (Matatu No. 12, 1994, Germany: Rodopi), ed. by Marlies Glaser and Marion Pausch, pp. 151-158.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, many early Jamaican intellectuals felt closer to Afro-American literature and arts than to those of neighbouring Cuba or Haiti, while Hispanic Caribbean authors have strong affinities with Latin American writing, but fewer with the Haitian or Jamaican literary canons.

<sup>45</sup> Cuban literature also reflects the island's close ties with the ex-USSR, as after 1959 many Cubans were sent to study or work in Russia. Today, the theme of Russia remains quite present in the

contact until the past two decades or so – except in exile and for the interlude of the 1920s to 1940s – the various literary canons of the Caribbean nevertheless offer remarkable similarities.

### **From pan-Africanism to Creolisation: the Hispanic and Francophone literary traditions**

Given the cultural and social similarities and the relatively long pan-Caribbean intellectual tradition outlined above, it is surprising that a pan-Caribbean approach to literary criticism should have remained so rare for so long. Marc Zimmerman, who in 1978 upheld the idea of the unity of the Caribbean in *Process of Unity*, warned us in 1989 that, because of the diversity of the region in all aspects, ‘una metateoría como “la unidad del Caribe” o la “unidad de las literaturas caribeñas” amenaza con convertirse en una crítica conservadora y no revolucionaria’ (p. 554). As for Gisela Kozak Rovero, she asserts in a comparative study of Puerto Rican and Dominican literature that there is no exchange or mutual influences between the two: ‘Al momento de mirar hacia lo hispano, puertorriqueños y dominicanos olvidaron su cercanía’. She concludes: ‘En consecuencia, afirmar la existencia de una literatura del Caribe [...] olvida que para la constitución de tal entidad, es indispensable una red de interrelaciones nacidas del desarrollo interno de los subsistemas en juego’ (p. 175).<sup>46</sup>

Yet there are amply sufficient links between the fiction of Puerto Rican Mayra Santos and that of Dominican Aurora Arias, for instance, to contend with Rodríguez that: ‘The obvious coincidence of themes and preoccupations, growing out of a similar experience, would be the best argument for the conception of the Caribbean as a unity’ (*Process of Unity*, p. 27). Colette Rice-Maximin, in her *Littératures caribéennes comparées*, demonstrates that Caribbean literature maintains a constant dialogue with the popular culture that inspires it. Unlike González in ‘El país de

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literary imagination, as attested recently by José Manuel Prieto González’s stories *Nunca antes habías visto el rojo* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, Pinos Nuevos, 1996), all set in Russia, Adelaida Fernández de Juan’s ‘Clemencia bajo el sol’ (in *¡Oh Vida!*, Havana: UNIÓN, 1999), which focuses on a Russian protagonist; and *Bad Painting* (Havana: UNIÓN, 1998) by the promising Anna Lidia Vega Serova, a half Russian writer born in St. Petersburg.

<sup>46</sup> Marc Zimmerman, ‘Literatura caribeña y su teorización: una perspectiva latinoamericana’, *La Torre* (Universidad de Puerto Rico), Nueva Epoca, III-2 (July-September 1989), pp. 531-560; Gisela Kozak Rovero, ‘Entre islas, una frontera’, in *XV Congreso sobre la literatura del Caribe hispanoparlante*, ed. by Ramón Mansoor, Caracas: Universidad Simón Bolívar/ University of the West Indies, 1995, pp. 163-175.

cuatro pisos', she sees this culture, common to the entire area, as derived not solely from pre-Columbian America and Africa, but also from medieval Europe and, to a lesser extent, India. This legacy involves tropes such as the Haitian revolution, which has fired the regional literary imagination; character types such as the priest, the sorcerer, the warrior, and the story-teller, all issued from folklore; literary codes such as the *carnavalesque*, the picaresque, the supernatural and magic realism inherited from various literary canons; and stylistic techniques based on the oral tradition and music, all elements, Maximin shows, on which writers have drawn innovatively. The originality of Maximin's approach lies in her contention that, due to the privileged position of the area as a cultural crossroads, Caribbean writers can combine several cultural systems, with endless possibilities of variations, all of which find an expression in the common popular culture. She is thus able to demonstrate the numerous similarities and correspondences in the writing across the region.

Certainly, the literary traditions of Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Guadeloupe, and Martinique all have their own particularities. The Hispanic literary canons, for instance, stand out in the area for their relative longevity: they progressively emerged as separate entities from the peninsular canon during the nineteenth century, in parallel to a nascent cultural identity that soon questioned the colonial system, notably in its institution of slavery and centralism. The distinct colonial policies of Spain and Britain, Ileana Rodriguez shows, had repercussions on the Cuban and Jamaican literary canons. The relative social stability of Cuba prior to the growth of the sugar economy, ensured by a sizeable eurocentric elite, enabled the emergence of the novel in the 1830s, when Jamaica, with its white Creole minority that rarely settled permanently on the island, mainly produced travel books (*Process of Unity*, pp. 67-68). These literary traditions thus largely derive from their socio-political context: for instance, the US invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898 fomented the resurgence of a nationalistic literature, while the US Occupation of Haiti in 1915, with the deep racism displayed by US marines and administrative officials, revived Haitian nationalism and forced intellectuals to re-assess their ideological and aesthetic values, thus triggering the birth of a truly indigenous

literary canon.<sup>47</sup> This coincided with a similar situation in the Dominican Republic, which was to repeat itself in Martinique under Vichy during World War Two.

Yet because of such coincidences in their socio-political contexts, these separate literary traditions present broad similarities. Attesting to this fact is the near contemporaneous emergence of three mutually influenced identity discourses with major local and regional literary impact: *negrismo*<sup>48</sup>, originating in Puerto Rico in the mid-1920s and taken up in early 1930s Cuba as *afrocubanismo*<sup>49</sup>; *indigénisme*<sup>50</sup>, in late 1920s Haiti; and *négritude*<sup>51</sup>, which reached the French Caribbean in the 1940s.

### *Negrismo, afrocubanismo, indigénisme and négritude: the theories of universality*

The 1920s Harlem Renaissance, *negrismo*, *afrocubanismo*, *indigénisme*, and finally *négritude* all sought to re-evaluate the image of the blacks and their culture, a task without precedent in history. These various ideological and artistic responses countered centuries of degradation and exploitation of black people with a revalorisation of folk culture coupled with a glorification of pre-colonisation Africa, and a re-appraisal of its legacy to the Americas. By challenging the hitherto

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<sup>47</sup> See J. Michael Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981, pp. 43-64.

<sup>48</sup> Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959) is usually regarded as the initiator and major exponent of *negrismo*, a movement primarily affecting poetry. His poetic search for a language and rhythm that could convey the blackness of Puerto Rican culture challenged general opinion on national identity. Despite poets such as Manuel del Cabral (1912-) and Aida Cartagena Portalatín (1918-1994), the impact of *negrismo* on Dominican letters was ultimately more limited than in the other two Hispanic Antilles.

<sup>49</sup> *Afrocubanismo* largely derives from the long tradition of *abolicionismo* and the anthropological work of Fernando Ortiz from the 1900s. This movement was not restricted to poetry but encompassed fiction (such as the writing of Lino Novás Calvo and Alejo Carpentier) and the plastic arts (notably the work of Wifredo Lam). The initiator and best-known representative of *afrocubanista* poetry is Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989). While his early work (*Motivos de son*, 1930 and *Sóngoro Consongo*, 1931, both in *Obra poética*, op. cit.) began to blend traditional Spanish verse with the Cuban *son*, he later turned to all Afro-Caribbean cultures.

<sup>50</sup> Price-Mars's anthropological work in Haiti initiated the *indigéniste* movement, which hailed the rural masses as the only authentic Haitians for remaining close to their African roots. *Indigénisme* was recuperated for political ends in the late 1930s by *noirisme*, which became the official ideology of dictator François Duvalier. The revolutionary writing of the Guyano-Martiniquan René Maran (*Batouala: Roman nègre*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1921), or the Guadeloupean Suzanne Lacascade (*Claire Solange, âme africaine*, Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1924), coincided with *indigénisme* and largely anticipated *négritude* in its denunciation of colonialism and avowed racial pride.

<sup>51</sup> *Négritude* came about with the publication of *L'étudiant noir* in Paris in 1935, by a group of Martiniquan students headed by Aimé Césaire (1913-), with the collaboration of the French Guyanese Léon Gontran Damas (1912-1978) and the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001). The journal took off from the radical *Légitime Défense*, produced by Etienne Léro and other Martiniquan students in 1932. But the movement was not truly initiated until the appearance of Césaire's poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) and Joseph Zobel's *Diab' la* (1940), a novel immediately banned by the Vichy government.

dominant cultural and racist values in societies where blacks were (and largely remain) the poorest and most marginalised sector of the population, this enterprise initiated a radical change in mentalities. This was to have major social implications in the following decades, notably the blacks' struggle for Civil Rights in the US of the 1960s. Another feature shared by these cultural movements was their vision of blackness as a unifying factor, and the ensuing solidarity they endeavoured to establish between the blacks of the Americas and Africa. Alistair Hennessy shows how US-based Caribbean intellectuals, such as the Jamaicans Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, or Afro-Americans who visited the Caribbean, such as Langston Hughes, who met Nicolás Guillén and René Depestre in Cuba and Haiti, played a determining role in the propagation of the Harlem Renaissance within the Caribbean.<sup>52</sup> Léon Gontran Damas, the second major Caribbean *négritude* poet, thus acknowledged Hughes and McKay as his mentors.

The major difference between *négritude* (or its Anglophone equivalents) and Hispanic Caribbean or even Haitian pan-Africanism, is its reliance on a binary opposition between black and white cultures. This could be regarded as its main theoretical limitation. Indeed, as Maryse Condé was to comment later, such a conception made the notion of blackness entirely dependent on that of whiteness, and did not undertake a real evaluation of black cultures *per se*.<sup>53</sup> Later generations of intellectuals have also contested the strong tendency to universalism in Césaire. His close collaboration in Paris with Francophone African students like Léopold Sédar Senghor, and his early realisation of the need for a unified decolonisation movement from the French territories led Césaire to construct a common origin for the black people in a pre-colonisation, mythical Africa whose diversity and contemporary reality were somewhat minimised, while the emphasis on the link with Africa tended to overshadow the socio-cultural specificities of blackness in the Caribbean. By contrast, Damas avoids presenting blackness as uniform by focusing (for example, in 'Hoquet'<sup>54</sup>) on the cultural assimilation and alienation characteristic – although not the sole prerogative – of the French colonisation pattern in the

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<sup>52</sup> Alistair Hennessy, introduction to his *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean, Vol. II. Unity in Variety: The Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean*, London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1992, pp. 1-35.

<sup>53</sup> 'Négritude césairienne, Négritude senghorienne', *Revue de littérature comparée* 3 (1974), pp. 409-419.

<sup>54</sup> From *Pigments*, Paris: G.L.M., 1937.



Caribbean. Nevertheless, it is precisely by understanding blackness as a universal notion that Césaire is able to transcend the racial basis of *négritude*, which then acts as a metaphor for the oppressed and the colonised people with whom to establish new solidarities. In his conception of blackness as a political metaphor, perhaps his main contribution to pan-Africanism, Césaire is very close to the Trinidadian C.L.R. James.

In the Hispanic Antilles the distinctive population make-up meant that the impact of pan-Africanism on the overall canon was ultimately short-lived, although it certainly paved the way for the integration of black characters in the regional fiction from the 1960s and 1970s. In the Francophone area on the other hand, the influence of *indigénisme* and above all *négritude* persists. Indeed, despite a limited regional resonance in the 1940s, *négritude* went on to encourage subsequent generations of French Caribbean intellectuals to promote alternative discourses (Fanonism in the 1950s, *antillanité* in the 1970s and 1980s, and *créolité* in the 1990s), which largely define themselves in opposition to it.

One specificity of the Hispanic Antillean revalorisation of the black heritage, especially in Guillén, lies in its emphasis on *mulatez* (or *mestizaje*), rather than blackness, that is, the conception of *all* Antilleans as *mulatos*, regardless of their actual phenotype. *Mulatez*, therefore, rests less on racial than on cultural criteria. Consequently, a Palés Matos in all appearance white could claim his black heritage. Heir to this conception is Roberto Fernández Retamar, for whom Caliban represents the *mulato* Antilleans: 'Nuestro símbolo *no es pues Ariel*, como pensó Rodó, *sino Calibán*' (p. 49, italics in the original).<sup>55</sup> By contrast, Anglophone and Francophone pan-Africanism singled the black element out of the multiracial and multicultural heritage of the Caribbean and the Americas.<sup>56</sup> This ideological position is to say the least problematic, since it does not account for the other racial groups and cultures of the area. Such an omission may be understandable in the Haitian context, where, despite miscegenation of African slaves with Tainos in the early colonisation period and with Europeans until their post-independence eviction, and notwithstanding the small Levantine community, the majority of the population is of predominantly

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<sup>55</sup> 'Calibán: Apuntes sobre la cultura de nuestra América', Buenos Aires: La Pléyade, 1971.

<sup>56</sup> The contrast is clear when considering that in Césaire's contemporaneous adaptation of Shakespeare's play *Une tempête* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1969), Caliban figures as a black slave and a Black Power Caribbean activist, while Ariel is represented as a mulatto slave.

African ancestry.<sup>57</sup> But Afrocentrism was certainly not an appropriate identity model for the Hispanic and Lesser Antilles, and it became potentially divisive. The various Caribbeanist ideologies, rooted in the land and geographically specific, that emerged in reaction to the phase of universalistic pan-Africanism can therefore be regarded as a natural progression.

***Mestizaje, antillanité and Creolisation: unity in diversity***

Frantz Fanon explains in 'Antillais et Africains' how the disillusionment of numerous Antilleans who had gone to Africa in an attempt to reconnect with their pre-slavery past and culture, in accordance with the precepts of Garveyism and *négritude*, had its roots in the misconception of blackness as a kind of universal essence relating to pre-colonial Africa. For Fanon the massive exodus to Africa of the 1950s and 1960s originated in the French Antilleans' abrupt realisation of their blackness, when the confrontation with overtly racist members of the pro-Vichy French navy compelled the local *intelligentsia* to question their hitherto complete cultural identification with the whites, and to rally *en masse* to the tenets of *négritude*, thereby revising their construction of the Africans as 'savages' having little in common with the 'civilised' Antilleans. They thus launched into a re-appraisal of blackness, suddenly held as a symbol of purity and virtue: 'Il semble donc', Fanon comments, 'que l'Antillais, après la grande erreur blanche, soit en train de vivre maintenant dans le grand mirage noir' (*Pour la révolution africaine*, p. 31). When the Africans refused to identify with them, the French Antilleans experienced 'le drame de n'être ni blanc ni nègre' (p. 30).

Thus Fanon deplores the process of idealisation of Africa at work in *négritude*, pointing out (as Glissant was to do later) that, although a revalorisation of black culture is a salutary and necessary step to regain self-esteem, the advocacy of a return to Africa is an inadequate response to the French Antillean predicament; he thereby anticipated the concept of Caribbeanness (*antillanité* or *antillanidad*). Caribbeanist ideologies emphasise the unique processes of racial and cultural syncretism, or hybridity (*mulatez/mestizaje* in the Hispanic context, *métissage* for

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<sup>57</sup> Haiti is often regarded as the 'most African' of the Caribbean, a view that its severance of direct ties with Europe after independence certainly helped to promote. Yet such a conception overlooks the process of cultural syncretism that has taken place in Haiti as elsewhere in the region. It also fails to account for the elite's profound (even extreme) attachment to French culture and values, which in itself is revealing of the longevity of the (now indirect) French influence.

the Francophones) and creolisation – that is, no longer the simple *co-existence* of some cultural elements imported to the Americas involved in the syncretic process, but their *adaptation* and the *creation* of new ones, resulting in the emergence of a new culture – that took place in the Americas. In these views, the uniqueness of the region lies in its diversity resulting from hybridity and creolisation, what the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, a pioneer in this area, called *transculturación*. Heir to Ortiz is Nancy Morejón, who sees in *mestizaje* and *transculturación* the two chief characteristics of the people and cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America.<sup>58</sup>

Alejo Carpentier likewise regards the region as culturally specific when he argues that ‘lo real maravilloso americano’ (‘the marvellous real’) has shaped the Latin Americans’ (and Antilleans’) perception of reality, to the extent that in these societies the supernatural world (inherited from Amerindian and African cultures) is accepted as fact.<sup>59</sup> The violence resulting from the encounter between the Amerindian, European and African civilisations and the numerous incongruities that characterise the history of the New World largely account for such a mentality. For Carpentier, the supernatural is an intrinsic part of the New World identity, since it has also fomented nationalism in the region. The Cuban author illustrates this in *El reino de este mundo*, which shows how the vaudou cult played an essential rôle in the slave uprisings led by Mackandal and later by Boukman, both preludes to the Haitian Independence War.

The Haitian writer Jacques Stephen Alexis (1922-1961) took up Carpentier’s views in ‘Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens’, a paper delivered at the First Congress of Black Writers held in Paris in 1956.<sup>60</sup> Alexis’ reservation as to the conception of ‘blackness’ as homogeneous is reflected in the phrase ‘culture d’origine nègre’, that he uses systematically instead of ‘culture nègre’ or ‘culture noire’. He emphasises that Haitian culture, although of predominantly African origin and therefore of undeniable kinship (‘cousinage’) with the cultures of that continent, nevertheless derives from a syncretism between Taino, various African, and several European (mainly French and Spanish) cultures. He concludes by exhorting the

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<sup>58</sup> *Fundación de la imagen*, 1984, rpt. by Letras Cubanas, Havana, 1988.

<sup>59</sup> ‘De lo real maravilloso americano’ (first version 1949), in *Ensayos*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1984, pp. 68-79. Carpentier distinguishes the marvellous real from the magical realism of 1920s Germany, which relies on the incorporation of a supernatural detail within an overall naturalistic painting or piece of writing; in his own conception the marvellous real depicts the supernatural in a matter-of-fact way.

<sup>60</sup> Published in *Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956), pp. 245-271.

Haitian artist to go beyond the racial factor to encompass all of the third world, thus reaching a humanistic dimension: 'nous ne serons jamais les sectateurs d'un particularisme étroit qui cloisonnerait le monde en races et catégories antagonistes' (p. 264). Alexis's rejection of a racist discourse had a certain urgency in mid-twentieth century Haiti, where the continuing, 150-year old rivalry between a black and a mulatto elite, both equally contemptuous of the masses, had brought the country to its downfall, and was propitious to the rise of Duvalierism (1956-1986). In this Alexis was joined by René Depestre, who likewise reacted to the *noiriste* claims to authenticity (supporting the eviction from power and persecution of the hitherto hegemonic mulatto caste) by stressing Haiti's multiculturalism.

In 'Bonjour et adieu à la négritude', Depestre asserts that the Haitian vaudou concept of *zombification* denotes the extreme mental and physical alienation undergone by the slaves. He remarks that *zombification* does not exist in the original African cult, a sign, in his opinion, that this concept translates a condition specific to the New World.<sup>61</sup> He also develops the notion of *marronnage culturel*. As opposed to the conventional *marronnage* practised by the blacks and Amerindians through physical resistance (revolt, escape and the establishment of communities cut off from plantation or mining societies), *marronnage culturel* designates their spiritual and mental resistance, or the various cultural strategies to which they have resorted to counter the onslaughts of the racist discourse and assimilationist policy of the colonial rule. An illustration of such *marronnage* is the syncretism undergone by vaudou, which in a first instance merged African with Taino deities, on which foundation Christian saints were later superimposed in order to comply (in appearance) with the religious demands of the system. Miguel Barnet's contention in 'La cultura que generó el mundo del azúcar' that the culture of the African slaves is the most enduring in Cuba concurs with Depestre's notion of *marronnage culturel*.

In Depestre's view this popular resistance not only anticipated *négritude*, or *marronnage* as practised by intellectuals, but it actually conditioned its emergence. In this respect, he agrees with the *indigénistes* that the Haitian masses have managed

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<sup>61</sup> In Haitian vaudou, a zombi is a person whose soul has been removed through supernatural means (in punishment for a crime, or as the work of evil spirits) and therefore under the will of the living. In Frankétienne's novel *Dézaï* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Fardin, 1975), the connection between zombification and slavery is explicit: one character zombifies a whole village in order to secure himself gratis, forced labour.

to resist cultural assimilation (largely due to their ongoing marginalisation from the modernisation of the country). Where Depestre radically departs from the *indigénistes*, however, is in his emphasis on the process of creolisation of Haitian culture (which he calls *américanité haïtienne*) in which, as he sees it, *all three* of its components, including the African, have undergone modifications in the American context. Depestre thus stresses the specificity of Caribbean cultures, which he regards as common to the whole of America.

Following on from Depestre and Alexis, Édouard Glissant contested the pan-Africanist identity model for the Caribbean people, promoting instead with Guillén the view that *métissage* portrays more accurately the reality of the region. In Glissant's opinion, *métissage* is a privileged position as cultural crossroads predisposing Caribbean societies to *Relation*, that is, to a natural openness to other cultures. So this concept does not simply relate to the racial and cultural syncretism of the Caribbean. Rather, it is an ideological position:

[Affirmer que] le métissage est valeur, c'est déconstruire ainsi une catégorie 'métis' qui serait intermédiaire entre deux extrêmes 'purs'. [...] Le métissage comme proposition suppose la négation du métissage comme catégorie, en consacrant un métissage de fait que l'imaginaire humain a toujours voulu [...] nier ou déguiser (*Le Discours antillais*, pp. 250-251).

Glissant later rejects the notion of *métissage* for that of *créolisation*, because, as he sees it: 'la créolisation est imprévisible, alors qu'on pourrait calculer les effets d'un métissage'.<sup>62</sup> So here Glissant's transition from a theory of Caribbeanness to one of Creolisation that draws on chaos is visible. Similarly, in the mid-1980s Nancy Morejón specifies that the *transculturación* characterising the Caribbean is a never-ending process:

'[...] un perenne proceso de transculturación ha calado en nuestras más vivas entrañas. El resultado de este proceso, en mayor o menor parte, no ha tocado a su fin; por tanto, no hay un resultado definitivo, estático. Aún somos un crisol que se empeña, se lustra, vuelve sobre sí mismo, se achica y se acrecienta a pesar de cuanta teoría a ultranza quiera crear un esquema artificioso o una nomenclatura rígida.' (*Fundación de la imagen*, p. 178).

As will be examined later, Michael Dash sees this ability to resist monolithic theories as characteristic of women writers in the Caribbean (*The Other America*, p. 109 and 120). The notion of a complex, heterogeneous identity thus gradually gave rise to that of an identity in constant transformation: rather than its hybrid

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<sup>62</sup> *Introduction à une poétique du Divers*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p. 19.

nature – that is, its *state* – it is creolisation as a *process* that has now become emblematic of Caribbeanness.

### Creolisation and exile: back to universality?

Incorporating chaos theory, Antonio Benítez Rojo's *La isla que se repite* envisages the Caribbean as one island repeated endlessly, each time with a difference. Benítez Rojo gives a superb demonstration of the creolisation process that took place in the archipelago in his discussion of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre in Santiago. He shows that more than a simple superimposition of Amerindian, African and Christian cults, the patron saint of Cuba is the embodiment of syncretism, because each of the figures that merged into one (Atabey, Oshún and Nuestra Señora de Illescas), were themselves a conflation of various deities: the fusion of Taino-Arawak Atabey with the Carib Orehu, various goddesses of West African religions, and the successive icons, dating back to Byzantium, that make up the Spanish Virgin. Such creolisation, the author argues, is what makes the Caribbean a unique region, unified by elements such as rhythm and an indefinable but specific way of being ('de cierta manera') that characterises all Antilleans.

In 1989, the Martiniquans Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant co-authored the manifesto *Éloge de la créolité*.<sup>63</sup> Largely influenced by Glissant's *antillanité*, this movement is also attuned in many ways to the Cuban text published in the same year, notably in its views on creolisation and its use of chaos theory. The *créolistes* contend that there was no real cultural synthesis in the French Caribbean, for if the diverse cultural elements interacted with each other, they did not merge. Therefore no real *métissage* took place, but rather the elaboration of a *mosaïque* of cultures. Such notion derives from the fundamental chaos principle of the diverse (what Glissant calls *le Divers*). The later Glissant's notion of *identité rhizome*, by opposition to an *identité racine*, translates this idea of cultural mosaic.

The *créolistes* no longer inscribe their theory in the Caribbean and now argue for a Creoleness (rather than Caribbeanness) that no longer has geographical implications, an evolution also followed by Glissant.<sup>64</sup> While admitting that *créolité*, or cultural syncretism, is characteristic of most of the Caribbean (parts of Cuba and

<sup>63</sup> *Éloge de la créolité*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995 (bilingual edition), first published in 1989.

<sup>64</sup> This move was anticipated by George Lamming, as reflected by the quote from *Pleasures of Exile*, p. 214 given above (p. 8).

some islands are nevertheless deemed to be not truly creolised), the three theoreticians claim that creolisation is not specific to the Caribbean, but can be found in other regions of the world, like the Indian Ocean. This means that Caribbean and other creolised cultures share commonalities, which should increase their disposition towards each other, a concept not far from Glissant's *Relation*. Chamoiseau's own notion of *créolité* thus allows him to transcend the concepts of nationality and cultural identity, which in a Caribbean context would otherwise prove problematic, given the tradition of exile and emigration of these societies: 'La créolité veut justement tenter de penser la conception de l'identité de demain. [...] L'idée de créolité nous permet de comprendre que les écrivains appartiendront de plus en plus à plusieurs cultures'.<sup>65</sup>

Although the *créolité* movement primarily concerns the Francophone Caribbean, the idea of an Antillean cultural identity that is no longer geographically specific has been developed, with other implications, by various Caribbeanists since the late 1980s. Maryse Condé and the Puerto Rican critics Juan Flores and Efraín Barradas, for instance, call for a redefinition of Caribbeanness that would account for the intense Antillean emigration to the West that began in the 1960s. It is only in the twentieth century, Roberto Márquez points out, that the issue of residence has become a determining factor in assessing an author's 'authenticity', to the extent that 'the fact of residence, say, in the U.S., even for five or ten years creates a veritable problematique out of the question of integral Caribbean identity'.<sup>66</sup> In the particular case of the Cuban literary canon, after 1959, residence inside or outside the island has of course become the signifier of a writer's political allegiances, so that it intertwines with nationalism.<sup>67</sup>

This study includes literature produced in the diaspora as well as in the Caribbean, since exile is a recurring feature affecting both writers and the wider society across the archipelago.<sup>68</sup> Several of the authors discussed in the next

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Marion Pausch, *Matatu* 12, (ed. by M. Glaser and M. Pausch, *op. cit.*), p. 153.

<sup>66</sup> *Process of Unity*, ed. by I. Rodríguez and M. Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>67</sup> Although her attitude towards exile Cuban writing has subsequently evolved, it is significant that in 'La mujer en la narrativa de la revolución: ponencia sobre una carencia', Luisa Campuzano should exclude diaspora women writers from the number of Cuban women writers with the words 'que allá las cuenten' (p. 359, in *Estatuas de sal*, ed. by M. Yáñez and M. Bobes, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-372).

<sup>68</sup> The term 'exile' is used here in a broad sense, to include all forms of *forced* emigration on political, economic, and (applying especially to women) social grounds, even when the decision to leave appears to be self-imposed. The reasons for such a redefinition of the term are explained in chapter five.

chapters belong to the diaspora. As O'Callaghan notes with specific reference to women, there is much to be gained from the insight of those writing abroad: 'the foreign-based women writers bring to their work new perspectives on "home" as well as searching questions about their place in the metropole'.<sup>69</sup> This question is explored in the final chapter.

Because they transcend the notions of race and ethnicity, pan-Caribbeanist and creolisation theories have often proved to be less restrictive than Afrocentrist ideologies. Indeed, Evelyn O'Callaghan notes how in the 1960s Anglophone Caribbean, some scholars (notably the Afro-Barbadian Brathwaite but also, to some extent, the Indo-Trinidadian Kenneth Ramchand) excluded white Creole writers from the nascent literary canon, on the grounds that they constituted a group 'drawn to the metropole while rooted in the Caribbean', whose work presented a Caribbean reality only relevant to a tiny dominant social class and espoused imperialist values, and was thus participant in the colonising project (*Woman Version*, p. 18). O'Callaghan shows that the post-colonial critic Gareth Griffiths shares this view on the political allegiances of early writers in post-colonial societies. The work of the major writer from Dominica Jean Rhys (1890-1979), who left definitively for England at nineteen, fell under such criticism. Edmondson shows how the racial factor was further complicated by class allegiances, but above all gender in Rhys's case.<sup>70</sup> The debate was carried on to the French Caribbean: the poet Saint-John Perse (1887-1975), who left Guadeloupe in his teens, was only fully included into the local literary corpus posthumously.<sup>71</sup> In the Hispanic Caribbean, where there is no straightforward correlation between being white and being of the dominant class, this was not an issue: the Cubanness of José Martí or the Puerto Ricanness of Eugenio María de Hostos and Ramón Emeterio Betances have never been contested.

When looking at the pre-twentieth-century Francophone and Anglophone regions, these Afrocentrist claims regarding the nationalist commitment of white Creoles are certainly not unfounded. Yet, as Régis Antoine argues in relation to

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<sup>69</sup> *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*, Basingstoke: Macmillan (Warwick University Caribbean Studies), 1993, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Belinda Edmondson, 'The Canon, the West Indian Writer, and the Novel, Ph.D. diss., University of Evanston, Illinois, June 1993, pp. 60-66.

<sup>71</sup> The opening of the Saint-John Perse Museum in Pointe-à-Pitre in 1987 could stand as the official recognition of the poet as Guadeloupean.



Saint-John Perse, the discourse of later white Creoles on their island could prove to be particularly liberating and enriching.<sup>72</sup> O'Callaghan points out that 'to specify racial or political, or indeed class, criteria for 'belonging' to West Indian literature, inevitably leads to more and more prescriptive injunctions about who is "in" and who is "out" ' (*Woman Version*, p. 21). Belinda Edmondson likewise remarks how Caribbean literature has tended to become synonymous with Afro-Caribbean literature, sometimes, but not frequently, including Indo-Caribbean writers too.<sup>73</sup> Besides the white Creoles, Chinese Caribbean authors have also been marginalised in the Anglophone Caribbean, especially in the 1960s; in the Francophone area, Indo-Antillean writers have only begun to receive critical attention in the last decade or so. Theories such as *mestizaje*, Glissant's *Relation*, and *créolité* have allowed for an enlargement of the notion of Caribbeanness by questioning the conception that Caribbean 'integrity' is somehow grounded in ethnicity, especially blackness.

Yet there remain prescriptive criteria concerning the nature of Caribbean writing, in terms of subject matter, setting or style. Puerto Rican writer José Luis González, a political exile in Mexico for over forty years, warns us in 'El escritor en el exilio' against narrow, provincial criticism and 'el viejo prejuicio nacionalista que consiste en creer que la identidad nacional de un escritor radica exclusivamente en la ubicación geográfica de sus temas' (*El país de cuatro pisos*, p. 105). In fact, many are the writers who, instead of focusing on the region, would rather open their work to the rest of the globe: for instance, Césaire and Fanon deal with the wider issues of blackness or colonialism. Similarly, Aida Cartagena Portalatín's concern for the lack of democracy worldwide is reflected in the structure of *Escalera para Electra*.<sup>74</sup> While dealing with Dominican history, this novel draws on the tradition of the Greek tragedy and establishes a parallel between the 1930 military coup in the Dominican Republic that preceded the thirty-one years' dictatorship of Trujillo, and the coup that took place in Greece in 1967. As for Maryse Condé, whose novels take us from Africa, to the Caribbean and the United States, she appears to regard herself less as Guadeloupean than as more widely speaking Antillean, or even as a member of the Black Diaspora, heir to what she calls a tradition of *errance*. The same applies

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<sup>72</sup> 'The Caribbean In Metropolitan French Writing', in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 1, *op. cit.*, ed. by A. James Arnold, pp. 349-362.

<sup>73</sup> 'Race, Tradition and the Construction of the Caribbean Aesthetic', *New Literary History* 25 (1994), pp. 109-120.

<sup>74</sup> *Escalera para Electra*, 1970, rpt. by Taller, Santo Domingo, 1975 and 1980.

to Myriam Warner-Vieyra, whose fiction switches from Guadeloupe to Paris and West Africa. Similarly, the *créolistes* readily claim a kinship with the other Caribbean people, by virtue of their *antillanité*, while their *créolité* binds them to any other people of comparable historical make-up or ethno-cultural syncretism, such as Cape Verde off the African coast, the Seychelles, Reunion and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, and Polynesia:

Nous, Antillais créoles, sommes donc porteurs d'une double solidarité:  
 -d'une solidarité antillaise (géopolitique) avec tous les peuples de notre Archipel, quelles que soient nos différences culturelles: notre Antillanité;  
 -d'une solidarité créole avec tous les peuples africains, mascarins, asiatiques et polynésiens qui relèvent des mêmes affinités anthropologiques que nous : notre créolité.  
 (Eloge de la Créolité, p. 33, italics in the original).

Some writers have nonetheless been criticised on the basis that their work does not reflect Caribbean reality, and is therefore not truly national, but reproduces instead alienating foreign canons. For instance, by and large Caribbeanists seem to agree that 'authentic' literature should be written in an 'authentic' language, meaning in vernacular (Creole, Patois, or Papiamentu), or else in a French, English, Spanish or Dutch language that seeks to reproduce the influence of the vernacular. As Edmondson notes: 'Creole language [...] is placed in the position of the standard, the yardstick that measures a work's "West Indianness"' ('Race, Tradition...', p. 109). Thus Maryse Condé's style has long been condemned by nationalists as 'too French', as following too closely French literary canons.<sup>75</sup> In their aesthetics, the *créolistes* can be equally restrictive, since they advocate the use of Creole or a French language heavily influenced by Creole and the oral tradition. Insofar as they are spoken by virtually the totality of the inhabitants of a given island, the Caribbean vernaculars are truly national languages. This is what motivated the focus on the literary experiments with French and Creole in Francophone texts in chapter three of this study, which explores the notion of nation language. However, arguing that 'authentic' writers therefore *ought to* aim towards Creole or a creolised style raises further problems: in particular, Creole, Patois and Papiamentu are primarily spoken, as opposed to written languages, and it seems a fair point to ask what authenticity they retain in the written form. As examined in

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<sup>75</sup> Critical pressure was such that Condé has felt the need to move towards a more 'authentic' style, that is to say a style more influenced by Creole and the oral tradition, as reflected in her later novels *Traversée de la mangrove* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989) and *La Migration des cœurs* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995).

the next section, women's writing has been especially affected by the prescriptive norms enunciated by canonical writers.

### **Women's writing and the literary canon: a tradition of exclusion**

Caribbean women anthologists and literary critics have often had a more pan-Caribbean approach than their male counterparts. The anthologies *Her True True Name* by Mordecai and Wilson, and *New Writing from the Caribbean* by Erika J. Waters attest to this. Nara Araújo thus notes the 'vocación integradora de las escritoras y su crítica'.<sup>76</sup> She further calls for the need to develop a pan-Caribbean perspective of Cuban women's writing, which she justifies with the historical and socio-cultural unity of the region, forming 'una plataforma de un entendimiento mutuo' (pp. 376-377). This 'platform' certainly accounts for the striking thematic and often stylistic similarities in writing by women from the Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanic Caribbean – such as Jamaica Kincaid from Antigua, Paule Marshall from Barbados, Edwidge Danticat and Micheline Dusseck from Haiti, Gisèle Pineau and Simone Schwarz-Bart from Guadeloupe, Cristina García, Ana Luz García Calzada, and Adelaida Fernández de Juan from Cuba, and Mayra Santos from Puerto Rico.<sup>77</sup> These women focus more specifically on the problematic position of Caribbean women, who despite their long tradition of material and financial self-sufficiency through their work and/or other strategies for survival, continue to live in societies that remain strongly male-dominated; on the centrality of childbearing and mothering; and on the importance of matrilinear bonding in the shaping of female identity, particularly the mother-daughter relationship.

<sup>76</sup> 'La escritura femenina y crítica feminista en el Caribe: otro espacio de la identidad', p. 373 in *Estatuas de sal*, ed. by Mirta Yáñez and Marilyn Bobes, *op. cit.*, pp. 373-384.

<sup>77</sup> The historical ties between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, reinforced by a continuous migratory flux in both directions, although more important from East to West of the border, have left their mark on the respective literatures of the islands. For instance, as the post-graduate student Janell Hobson showed in her paper given at the Sixth International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars held in Grenada in May 1998, both the Haitian Edwidge Danticat and the Dominican Julia Álvarez refer to the myth of women turning into butterflies in their fiction. Puerto Rican fiction also presents many thematic similarities with texts from Guadeloupe and Martinique stemming from their shared condition as colonies: this is illustrated by the close resemblance in subject matter and treatment between *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1980) by the Guadeloupean Myriam Warner-Vieyra and *Porque hay silencio* (San Juan: ediciones Laureles, 1994, first published in 1986) by the Puerto Rican Alba Nydia Ambert. Kathleen Balutansky likewise argues that post-1970s Anglophone and Francophone women's writing displays the common aim to resist simplistic definitions of identity ('Anglophone and Francophone Fiction by Caribbean Women: Redefining "Female Identity"', in *History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 3, ed. by A. J. Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-282).

The past few decades have witnessed a boom in women's fiction across the Caribbean, whose turning point was the 1980s, except in Puerto Rico where it took place a decade earlier. In Guadeloupe, the writing from the 1970s of Maryse Condé (1937-) and especially Simone Schwarz-Bart (1938-) also anticipated this trend, beginning to make a difference in French Caribbean letters. Yet although these authors soon outsold most of their male compatriots, they remained largely overshadowed by the Martiniquan male writers up to the mid-1980s. At the start of the twenty-first century the literary canon across the Caribbean (apart from Puerto Rico) is still on the whole dominated by men. This is especially true of the Francophone region: Sam Haigh describes the literary tradition of the French Caribbean as one that 'stretches like a paternal line of descent from colonization to the present day'.<sup>78</sup> Neither precursors such as Suzanne Lacascade, Marie-Magdeleine Carbet, Michèle Lacrosil, and Mayotte Capécia, nor Jacqueline Manicom, whose promising literary debut was cut short by suicide, gained literary prominence locally or worldwide, and up until the 1990s they attracted the attention of only a few critics.<sup>79</sup>

By the early 1980s only one female author in Haiti had succeeded in gaining a relative recognition among critics and the public: Marie Chauvet (1917-1975). Since Chauvet was writing in the 1950s and 1960s, some twenty years before Condé and Schwarz-Bart, this could suggest more tolerance towards women within the Haitian canon than in the French Antilles.<sup>80</sup> Yet on the contrary, Michael Dash remarks, the publication of her masterpiece *Amour, colère, folie* in 1968 did not bring Chauvet due recognition, but 'divorce, exile and silence [...] in quick succession', for her

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<sup>78</sup> 'L'écriture féminine aux Antilles: une tradition naissante', p. 1, unpublished paper given at the Conférence de la Francophonie, Montreal, September 1996. Thus Condé and Schwarz-Bart did not enjoy all the recognition they deserved until the mid-1980s. By contrast, Chamoiseau was awarded the prestigious Prix Goncourt for *Texaco* in 1992, much before he was as widely read.

<sup>79</sup> Suzanne Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, op. cit; Marie-Magdeleine Carbet (ca. 1902), numerous writing in all genres, including the novels *Au péril de ta joie* (1972), *Au village en temps longtemps* (1977), and *Au sommet de la sérénité* (1980), all published by Léméac in Montréal; Mayotte Capécia (1916-1955), *Je suis martiniquaise* and *La négresse blanche*, Paris: Correa, 1948 and 1950; Michèle Lacrosil (1915-), *Sapotille et le serin d'argile*, Fort-de-France: Désormeaux, n.d (rpt. in 1960 by Gallimard), *Cajou* (1961), and *Demain Jab-Herma* (1967), Paris: Gallimard; Jacqueline Manicom (1938-1976), *Mon examen de Blanc*, Paris: Editions Sarrazin, 1972, and *La graine: journal d'une sage-femme*, Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1974.

<sup>80</sup> Marie Chauvet's first novel, *Fille d'Haïti* (Paris: Fasquelle) was published in 1954, whereas Condé's first novel appeared in 1976 (*Hérémakhonon*, Paris: 10/18) and Schwarz-Bart's in 1972 (*Pluie et vent sur Têlémée Miracle*, Paris: Le Seuil). Chauvet's fiction also includes *La danse sur le Volcan* (1957), *Fonds des Nègres* (1960), the trilogy *Amour, colère et folie* (1968) and the posthumous novel *Rapaces* (1986). Other important early Haitian writers include Annie Desroy (1893-1948), Marie-Thérèse Colimon (1918-) and Nadine Magloire (fl. 1968).

novel was considered too indecorous and politically daring (*The Other America*, p. 110). To date Chauvet's work remains out of print, by decision of her relatives. Similarly, Nicole Aas-Rouxparis reports in 'Voix/voies migrantes haïtiennes' the Haitian intelligentsia's reaction to the publication of *Le mal de vivre* and *Autopsie in vivo: le sexe mythique*, forcing the author, Nadine Magloire, to leave Haiti in 1979.<sup>81</sup> Magloire has since ceased to write, silenced by 'la souriante condescendance avec laquelle la littérature féminine [est] reçue par le public en Haïti'.<sup>82</sup> The Haitian literary scene, Aas-Rouxparis notes, is 'dominée historiquement essentiellement par des voix masculines en Haïti comme dans la diaspora': out of the over two hundred literary or critical items listed in the *Callaloo* complete bibliography of Haitian works in 1992, only about thirty were written by women, and only one author in four publishing after 1950 is female.

The Anglophone region offered a similar picture in the same period. In the older literary tradition of the Hispanic Antilles, Daisy Cocco de Filippis notes how '[h]asta la década de los ochenta, cada generación y escuela literaria en la República Dominicana produce una mujer "token"' (*Combatidas, combativas y combatientes*, p. 37), while Mirta Yáñez points to the discreet but constant presence of women's fiction throughout Cuban letters, which she qualifies as '[una] huella [que] transita por los momentos más significativos de la trayectoria literaria cubana' (*Estatuas de sal*, p. 31). In this Yáñez reiterates the views of Susana Montero; Ramón Luis Acevedo makes similar comments in connection with Puerto Rico.<sup>83</sup> So prominent early Hispanic fiction female figures (most of them poets as well as writers) include in Cuba La Condesa de Merlin (1789-1852), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873), Lydia Cabrera (1899-1991), Dulce María Loynaz (1902-1997), Dora Alonso (1910-1998), and Mary Cruz (1923- ); the poet Salomé Ureña (1850-1897), Aida

<sup>81</sup> Both published by Editions du Verseau, Port-au-Prince in 1968 and 1975 respectively.

<sup>82</sup> Adrienne Gouraige, 'Littérature haïtienne: le rôle des femmes dans la société chez deux romancières', *Revue Francophone de Louisiane* 4. 1, 1989, p. 36, quoted in Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, 'Voix/voies migrantes haïtiennes: Nadine Magloire, de la parole au silence', in *Elles écrivent des Antilles*, p. 53. This patronising attitude still prevails in the French Caribbean: Gisèle Pineau expressed her frustration on this point in an interview granted in January 1998.

<sup>83</sup> See Daisy Cocco de Filippis, *Combatidas, combativas y combatientes* (Santo Domingo: Taller, 1992) on the Dominican Republic; Ramón Luis Acevedo, *Del silencio al estallido* (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1991) on Puerto Rico; and on Cuba Susana Montero's 'Del discurso en sí al discurso para sí', p. 25 (*Anuario del Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística (Estudios Literarios)*, 23, 1992, pp. 16-29), Luisa Campuzano's 'La mujer en la narrativa de la revolución', *op. cit.*, and Mirta Yáñez's 'Y entonces la mujer de Lot miró...' (in her *Estatuas de sal*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-38). Nara Araújo's article 'La escritura femenina y la crítica feminista en el Caribe' (*Estatuas de sal*, pp. 373-384) is pan-Caribbean in scope, with an emphasis on Cuba.

Cartagena Portolatín (1918-1994) and Hilma Contreras (1913- ) in the Dominican Republic; and in Puerto Rico the poet Clara Lair (1895-1973) and the poet and dramatist Julia de Burgos (1914-1953).

Yet until the 1980s this female literary tradition remained largely peripheral to the canon: many of these writers were dismissed by a patronising criticism in their lifetime, only to be recovered through recent acts of 'literary archaeology', to borrow a phrase from Luisa Campuzano, tellingly indicative of the degree of oblivion into which some of these women writers had fallen. Gómez de Avellaneda, today well remembered for her abolitionist novel *Sab*, was denied a place in the Spanish Royal Academy because of her sex.<sup>84</sup> While not denied this honour, Loynaz nonetheless had to await the reception of the Premio Cervantes in 1992 to see her novel *Jardín* re-published.<sup>85</sup> Julia de Burgos, today well-known and acclaimed for her feminist and *negrista* writing, actually died destitute and without recognition in New York. Many of her compatriots, including Clara Lair, had to face similar – though not such extreme – ostracism: the literary talent of Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo (1871-1961), for instance, was not rescued from oblivion until the re-publication of her first novel *La muñeca* in 1987.<sup>86</sup> Acevedo names another dozen real female talents marginalised by critics, noting that Puerto Rican women writers only began to gain academic and popular recognition from 1976 (*Del silencio al estallido*, pp. 9-25). Poetry was the only genre where women were tolerated, considered the sole mode of expression suitable for them because of its alleged lyrical and intimist qualities.<sup>87</sup>

In the French Caribbean, several critics agree that a dominant masculinist canon has up until recently succeeded in excluding and silencing female authors, particularly in Martinique.<sup>88</sup> Here emerging Haitian women writers are perhaps at an

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<sup>84</sup> *Sab*, 1841, rpt. by the Instituto Cubano del Libro, Havana, 1973.

<sup>85</sup> *Jardín, Novela lírica*, Madrid: Aguilar, 1951, rpt. by Letras Cubanas, Havana, 1993.

<sup>86</sup> *La muñeca*, 1895, rpt. by Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña/Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan, 1987.

<sup>87</sup> See Acevedo, Campuzano, Cocco de Filippis, Hernández, Montero, Yáñez, and Araújo.

<sup>88</sup> See A. James Arnold in 'The Gendering of *créolité*: the erotics of colonialism' (in *Penser la créolité*, ed. by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, Paris: Karthala, 1995, pp. 21-40), p. 23. He refers to Clarisse Zimra's discussion of Mayotte Capécia, silenced by the harsh reviews of her works, largely prompted by Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1952, rpt. in 1975) in 'Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary Women Writers' (*L'esprit créateur* 17. 2, Summer 1977, pp. 103-114). Césaire has until recently overshadowed the central role his wife Suzanne played in the publication of the review *Tropiques* (1941-1945) in Martinique. Christiane P. Makward

advantage over their Guadeloupean and Martiniquan counterparts, as its tradition of exile may well have conferred on the Haitian canon greater artistic freedom. This ostracism is even more evident in theory – and this also applies to the Hispanic region – which has largely been male-orientated, prescribing gender-exclusive aesthetic and ideological criteria, and has offered women writers unsatisfactory models, both for themselves and for the female *persona*. Thus the inadequacy of the *négritude* quest for the female subject is discussed in chapter four.

For all its relevance, especially in its time, Fanon's psychoanalysis of the French Antilleans, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, which has remained a landmark for decades, likewise displays a marked phallogocentrism.<sup>89</sup> This is clearly illustrated in his critique of Mayotte Capécia's novel *Je suis martiniquaise* in relation to the issue of miscegenation. In the chapter 'La femme de couleur et le Blanc', Capécia's novel receives harsh treatment, simply, it seems, because it depicts a female protagonist suffering from the psychological obsession with lactification, or the desire to whiten oneself and one's descendants through interracial marriage and the adoption of a 'white' (i.e., assimilated) lifestyle. Yet in the subsequent chapter 'L'homme de couleur et la Blanche', Fanon is much more lenient towards male writers describing the lactification complex from a masculine perspective. His analysis bespeaks an obvious bias, in that it only pictures female desire within the frame of lactification: while claiming that the black man's desire for a white person does not necessarily amount to a desire for whiteness, in the case of the black woman Fanon conflates the two objects of desire.<sup>90</sup> Fanon's view was called into question in the early 1960s and 1970s by two women novelists from Guadeloupe, Michèle Lacrosil in *Sapotille ou le serin d'argile* and Cajou and Jacqueline Manicom in *Mon examen de blanc*. Both,

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remarks: 'Il est décevant de constater que le discours le plus intelligent, le plus acquis au post-modernisme, le plus informé de la philosophie post-colonialiste, se ferme catégoriquement à la parole féminine. L'absence radicale de toute prise en compte de la différence *sexuelle* et du point de vue *féminin*, l'absence radicale de la moindre allusion à leur existence même, aux textes et aux paroles qu'elle a produits depuis vingt ans [...] caractérise encore aujourd'hui *L'Éloge de la créolité*' ('De bouche à oreille à bouche: Ethnodramaturgie d'Ina Césaire, p. 142, in *L'héritage de Caliban*, ed. by Maryse Condé, Pointe-à-Pitre: Jasor, 1992, pp. 123-146).

<sup>89</sup> Besides simply denouncing male supremacy (phallogocentrism), this term coined by Derrida and used by Arnold in his article suggests the *elaboration* of male-centred or masculinist theories.

<sup>90</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting rightly points out that an endeavour to counter Fanon's gender bias should not lead feminist critics to deny the negrophobia and in particular the problematic views on black women expressed in Capécia's text ('Sexist, Misogynist or Anti-Racist Humanist? Frantz Fanon and Mayotte Capécia', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 1. 1, University of Leeds, UK, 1997, pp. 19-32). Nevertheless, Fanon is much more condescending and dismissive towards Capécia than towards René Maran. Some critics conjecture that Fanon's own black father and white mother and his marriage with a white woman may explain this discrepancy.

Haigh shows, challenge Fanon's vision of female desire by depicting heroines 'who refuse the logic of lactification and the attempt at sexual and racial domination that it may be seen to represent. They present us with women who [...] may actually choose to desire whiteness within the context of same-sex relationships – a phenomenon which, again, Fanon readily admits he is unable to imagine at all' ('L'écriture féminine aux Antilles', p. 3).

A. James Arnold discusses the major French Caribbean discourses (*négritude*, Fanonism, *antillanité* and the latest *créolité*) in relation to their treatment of gender. 'The *créolité* movement', Arnold remarks, 'has inherited from its antecedents, *antillanité* and *négritude*, a sharply gendered identity. Like them, it is not only masculine but masculinist' ('The Gendering of *créolité*', p. 21).<sup>91</sup> According to Arnold, Fanon's dismissive reading of Capécia originates in his inability 'to recognize that there exist two gendered visions of the French West Indian culture', one 'masculinist', the other 'womanist' (p. 23). Through his discussion of another chapter of *Peau noire*, 'Le nègre et la psychopathologie', Arnold demonstrates that Fanon's discourse is extremely homophobic, denoting a conception of masculinity and femininity as two rigid, mutually exclusive categories. And here, Arnold argues, lies the root of the problem, the basis on which the sharp division between male and female literary traditions was laid in the French Caribbean. The period in which Césaire's *négritude* and Fanon's essay were produced could to some extent excuse their phallogocentrism. Today, when the past two or three decades have witnessed both the proliferation of women writers in the Caribbean and the growth of feminism and women studies worldwide, such an argument cannot be invoked in favour of the later major theories elaborated in the French Caribbean, *antillanité* and *créolité*, which have largely remained male-centred. Arnold shows how this tendency is also revealed in Édouard Glissant, as examined in chapter two.

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<sup>91</sup> Arnold notes that the trajectory followed by the *négritude* hero in Césaire's writing (notably in *Cahier* and *Et les chiens se taisaient*) is inadequate for the female subject, for it 'requires the stereotyped representation of the Mother (symbolic of a universal humanism) and the Lover (symbolic of maternal submission to biological necessity)', and the hero 'must transcend these representations of feminine weakness in order to realize his salvatory maleness' (p. 22). With reference to the phallogocentrism of Césaire's *négritude*, A. James Arnold notes that 'public discussion of this problem, and the very recognition of a problem' did not begin until the early 1980s, although it was anticipated by Clarisse Zimra's 1977 article 'Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary Women Writers', which was 'calling attention to the suppression of women writers of the French West Indies by Frantz Fanon [...] under the crushing weight of psychoanalytic theory' (pp. 22-23).



Arnold observes that Hispanic Caribbean letters are not as sharply gender-divided and homophobic as in the French Antilles. Yet two key essays from Puerto Rico can be cited as counter-examples: Antonio S. Pedreira's *Insularismo* and René Marqués's 'El puertorriqueño dócil'.<sup>92</sup> With his frankly misogynistic assertion that: 'La mujer [...] no ha podido todavía independizarse de la frivolidad. Vive entre apariencias y temores y en general se conforma con arañar las cosas sin penetrar en su meollo. [...] Por poca cosa se enternece y tiene su sistema nervioso a flor de piel' (p. 94), Pedreira justifies his concern about the feminisation of the teaching corps, which, in a logic Marqués was to use twenty-five years later in relation to male emigration, he regards as an obstacle to the development of Puerto Rican nationalism. René Marqués's equally masculinist statement that 'US patriarchy' jeopardises the existing social order of *machismo* bespeaks a similar gendering of nationalism. Not only does Marqués see the growing power of women in Puerto Rican society as threatening, rather than as a rightful redressing of social inequalities, but, as discussed in chapter two, he systematically denies women's participation in the nationalist struggle.

The emergence of major women fiction writers from the 1970s, reflecting the impact of feminism, has begun to alter this masculinism. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, the direct influence of the US facilitated and accelerated female emancipation, reinforced in Cuba with the coming of the Revolution in 1959.<sup>93</sup> The social effects of the US domination over the Dominican Republic from 1916, however, were more limited, and Dominican women writers still have to fight in order to be heard and read. Angela Hernández stresses that in a society still largely hampered by poverty and illiteracy, writing becomes a marginal, costly, and even superfluous occupation that is potentially dangerous, given the political climate of the country.<sup>94</sup> Besides these factors affecting all Dominican writers, women have to face the extreme conservatism of their society. Their right to financial independence, for instance, is a

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<sup>92</sup> *Insularismo*, 1934, rpt. by Editorial Edil, San Juan, 1987; 'El puertorriqueño dócil' (1960), in *El puertorriqueño dócil y otros ensayos (1953-1971)*, 1966, rpt. by Editorial Antillana, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1977).

<sup>93</sup> Yet Loida Figueroa concludes her comparative study of the integration of women in the three Hispanic Antilles: 'Parece "grosso modo" que ha habido más participación de la mujer en casi todos los órdenes de la vida en Puerto Rico que en las otras Antillas' ('El papel histórico y social de la mujer en el Caribe hispano, especialmente en Puerto Rico', p. 162, *Atenea* 6: 1-2, 3<sup>ra</sup> época (Jan.-Dec. 1986), University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez) pp. 149-170.

<sup>94</sup> 'De críticos y narradoras', in Cocco de Filippis, *Combatidas...*, 423-435, p. 426.

very recent acquisition: as late as 1940 a law forbade them to pursue any profession without the previous consent of their father, husband, or any other man legally responsible.<sup>95</sup> Hernández also stresses the need to question the criteria hitherto adopted for the evaluation of women's writing, since literary criticism has been shaped by men.

### **The emergence of a female literary tradition**

Elizabeth Wilson distinguishes between Francophone women writers born before 1930, among them the aforementioned on p. 30, and those born after 1930.<sup>96</sup> The latter began to emerge in the 1970s and, besides Condé, Schwarz-Bart and Manicom, they include Dany Bébel-Gisler (ca. 1940- ), Lucie Julia (ca. 1940- ), and Myriam Warner-Vieyra (1939- ), all from Guadeloupe. Since then new writers have emerged, usually born after 1945 and beginning to publish in the late 1980s and 1990s, most notably Edwidge Danticat (1969- ), Jan J. Dominique (1953- ), Yanick Lahens (1953- ), and the lesser-known Micheline Dusseck (1946- ) for Haiti; Michelle Gargar de Fortfalaise (n. d.), Gisèle Pineau (1956- ), Sylviane Telchid (1941- ), and Francesca Velayoudom-Faithful (1951- ) for Guadeloupe; and finally the less prominent Ina Césaire (1942- ), Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie (ca. 1951- ), Michèle Maillet (ca. 1950- ), and Marie-Reine de Jaham (n. d.) for Martinique. Such a classification is only approximate, and in fact the prevalent factor is not so much the authors' age as the characteristics of their works. Thus Telchid's *créoliste* fiction places her in the third group, while Warner-Vieyra bridges the second and third generations.

The absence of significant Haitian women writers born after 1930 from Wilson's bibliography is no doubt imputable to a fierce repression of intellectuals under the

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<sup>95</sup> By contrast, as a result of the independence wars Cuban women have been integrated in the labour force since the 1870s: their priority of employment over cheap immigrant labour was guaranteed by law from 1917. By 1934, Cuban women had gained major legal rights regarding education, labour, property, divorce and suffrage, all advances that the Revolution was to consolidate. The same is true of Puerto Rican women, who obtained suffrage in 1932. See K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991.

<sup>96</sup> 'Bibliographie de la littérature féminine des Antilles. Œuvres choisies', in *Chemins actuels* 36 (November 1987), pp. 19-30. Wilson focuses on black women writers. Her pre-1930 generation groups together nineteenth-century authors and those contemporary to the pan-Africanist movements, which suggests that women's fiction has not adhered to the various local literary trends as strictly as male writing.

Duvaliers<sup>97</sup> that would perhaps deter women writers more particularly: as illustrated by the example of Marie Chauvet, women (along with their literary production) have been for long considered their husbands' property, and the danger involved in literary activity could be invoked as an additional argument to limit their writing. The reasons for the absence of Martiniquans in that generation, however, are to be sought elsewhere. If in Guadeloupe contemporary male writers – Daniel Maximin, Max Jeanne and Ernest Pépin being the only novelists of relative renown – are eclipsed by their female counterparts, in Martinique the situation is reversed. Among French Caribbean writers, therefore, the men of highest profile are all from Martinique (Césaire, Zobel, Fanon, Glissant, Xavier Orville, Vincent Placol, Chamoiseau, Confiant), whereas the women are from Guadeloupe (Schwarz-Bart, Condé, Warner-Vieyra, Pineau).<sup>98</sup> Wilson comments that this discrepancy takes on significance 'quand on entrevoit la Guadeloupe comme un pays plus militant et nationaliste et donc plus enclin vers l'indépendance, alors que la société martiniquaise se tourne de façon plus sensible vers la métropole' (p. 20). Thus in Guadeloupe the nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s may have favoured the development of female writing; the more thorough assimilation of the sister island may have resulted in a greater acceptance of French bourgeois values among members of the upper classes, which could explain why Martiniquan women, unlike their Guadeloupean counterparts, would have for long considered writing not a suitable occupation. Another possible explanation is simply that the quasi absence of major male literary figures residing on the island has benefited Guadeloupean women writers: Condé once noted the lack of literary tradition in Guadeloupe, as opposed to Martinique (*Entretiens*, p. 43).

Wilson notes that there is an increasing political awareness (in the broad sense of the term) from the first to the second generation: 'la conscience de Manicom par exemple est bien plus élevée que celle de Capécia' (p. 24). Consequently, in the later works the female character is not as sharply alienated. Yáñez likewise points out that Hispanic Caribbean women writers have not always displayed feminist consciousness: 'presencia femenina no es conciencia femenina' (*Estatuas de sal*,

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<sup>97</sup> For example, René Depestre went into definitive exile in 1946, while Jacques Stéphen Alexis was executed under the dictatorship after attempting to foment a peasant rebellion.

<sup>98</sup> While Ina Césaire is principally a playwright, Dracius-Pinalie's publications remain scarce; de Jaham's novels are popular romances in a tropical setting, with which this study is not concerned.

p. 31), and their acquisition of a self-confident voice is a recent achievement. The separate anthologies by Acevedo, Cocco de Filippis, and Yáñez and Bobes concur in identifying three phases in their fiction. Cocco de Filippis uses Aida Cartagena Portalatín's classification into 'combatidas', or the marginalised and silenced ones, who did not manage to escape totally the constraints imposed by society, as reflected in their practice of self-censorship; 'combativas', whose work is openly feminist; and finally 'combatientes', whose feminist tone is both softer and more confident. Thus, here too, there was a radicalisation in themes and tone between the first phase and the second: in Acevedo's words, there was a shift from a 'narrativa femenina' to a 'narrativa feminista'. In his view, in the first period 'lo "femenino" tiende a definirse de acuerdo a los patrones patriarcales dominantes, sin una clara conciencia de su posición particular y sin una abierta intención reivindicadora, aunque sí evidenciando las tensiones, contradicciones y frustraciones de la existencia femenina', while 'en la etapa feminista [...] la conciencia del sexismo y el rol subordinado de la mujer se hace mucho más aguda y se expresa en forma abierta y agresiva' (*Del silencio al estallido*, p. 11). From the mid-1980s, however, Puerto Rican women writers have become less strident on feminist issues, to the point that Acevedo comments on the disappearance of feminist concerns in the fiction of the Cuban-Puerto Rican Mayra Montero. This is also clearly observable in later writing by Ana Lydia Vega and Magali García Ramis, as well as in most writing by the younger generation of Hispanic Caribbean women, notably Mayra Santos, discussed in the next chapter, as well as Aurora Arias and Anna Lidia Vega Serova. On the other hand, authors such as Julia Álvarez, Alba Ambert, Alba Nydia Rivera Ramos, Adelaida Fernández de Juan, Ana Luz García Calzada, and Ángela Hernández are at the transition between the last two stages.

The three phases did not necessarily coincide in the three Hispanic Antilles, nor is the evolution strictly diachronic. Thus if the early generation broadly dates back to the end of the nineteenth century right up to the mid twentieth century, Cocco de Filippis nevertheless places Virgilia Elena Ortea (1866-1903) and Delia Weber (1900-1982) in the first group, which indicates that the *combatidas* and *combativas* phases overlap. Weber's dates also suggest that in the Dominican Republic, where the influence of feminism came later, the first phase runs much longer than in Puerto Rico and Cuba. Yet the open criticism of the *trujillato* as well as the openly feminist tone of the *combativas* Aida Cartagena Portalatín and Hilma Contreras in the 1940s

and 1950s predated the Puerto Rican *narrativa feminista*, which according to Acevedo only began timidly in the 1960s.

Where in Puerto Rico Acevedo talks about an 'explosion' ('estallido'), in Cuba Nara Araújo only sees a 'blooming' ('eclosión') of women's writing: different metaphors that suggest the varying intensity and abruptness of its impact on the wider literary canons. The 1970s witnessed the emergence of several Puerto Rican women writers who soon acquired international renown: Rosario Ferré (1942- ) and Magali García Ramis (1946- ), both of whom published their first book in 1976; Carmen Lugo Filippi (1940- ) and Ana Lydia Vega, who co-authored their first book in 1981; and Olga Nolla (1938- ) and Mayra Montero (1952- ), who began to publish at a later stage. Ferré, García Ramis, Vega and Montero have received critical acclaim at home and abroad. Besides, García Ramis and Vega are enjoyed by the general public, and the former's *Felices pascuas, tío Sergio* is on the school curriculum.<sup>99</sup> Whereas the fiction of Violeta López Suria in the 1950s, and Anagilda Garrastegui and Olga Elena Resumil in the 1960s had anticipated this trend, it went unnoticed until the 1980s.

But, besides their undeniable talent and social change, it was their active participation in leading literary reviews that secured these writers a place in the literary pantheon. These reviews were platforms from which they disseminated their fiction and poetry, voiced their opinion in essays, hitherto a male genre, and encouraged subsequent female writers.<sup>100</sup> To date, there has been no comparable phenomenon in the Francophone area, where Condé is the only woman to cultivate theoretical writing with consistency, and where literary production still relies heavily on French publishing houses. However, the growing role of the Guadeloupean publishing house Jasor, now directed by a woman, Régine Jasor, may soon bring some change, as may Ina Césaire's involvement with Éditions Caribéennes since the 1980s. In the Dominican Republic, Cocco de Filippis notes that as early as the 1950s Cartagena Portalatín founded the collection 'La Isla Necesaria', which published and supported young writers.

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<sup>99</sup> *Felices pascuas, tío Sergio*, 1986, rpt. by Editorial Antillana, San Juan, 1992.

<sup>100</sup> The most influential journals in this respect were *Penélope o el Otro Mundo* (1972-73), run by Lydia Zoraida Barreto, *Zona de carga y descarga* (1972-75), run by Ferré and Nolla, and Nilita Vientós Gastón's *Sin Nombre*.

By contrast with the Puerto Rican 'explosion', Luisa Campuzano's 1986 article exposes the quantitative and qualitative 'gaps' in Cuban post-revolutionary women's fiction, while Araújo notes that feminist literary criticism in Cuba 'awoke' in the 1980s, with the work of Luisa Campuzano and Susana Montero (p. 375). Yet in the first half of the century, Cuban women had gained prominent positions in the literary field, running twenty-seven newspapers and magazines between 1909 and 1939.<sup>101</sup> They also contributed to theoretical debates and literary innovation, as in the case, from the 1940s, of Lydia Cabrera's ethnological work and the pioneering feminist studies by Mirta Aguirre (1912-1980). The contrast with the 1980s is imputable to two factors. Firstly, the Revolution's imposition of its ideological agenda on intellectuals, resulting in 'el periodo gris' of Cuban literature. As Yáñez puts it, 'el "realismo" a ultranza y ordenanza' of the 1970s paralysed the creativity of many female authors, turning them into 'salt statues':

... la abigarrada problemática social y estética trajo muchas consecuencias, entre ellas la casi total exclusión de la voz narrativa femenina. [...] no sólo por razones de 'invisibilidad' sexista, sino por la propia inclinación salvaje de la balanza temática hacia los temas de la 'dureza', las narradoras se convirtieron con rapidez en estatuas de sal (*Estatuas de sal*, p. 32).

If this situation certainly affected men and women alike, in Amir Valle's opinion women's writing was further constrained by the necessity to demonstrate unconditional support to the feminist cause, to display a 'feminismo didactista':

Este didactismo, que logró, incluso, interceptar algunas zonas de la creación de autoras 'hechas' en promociones anteriores a la Revolución, frustró/retrasó/estatizó las propuestas estéticas [...] de la mayor parte de las narradoras conocidas a partir de la década del '80.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, paradoxically, the pro-feminist social climate in Cuba led to the gradual withering away of female literary voices, particularly in fiction. Notable exceptions in the 1970s were María Elena Llana, Mirta Yáñez, Lázara Castellanos, and Olga Fernández, in whose work Valle notes a 'dinamismo antifeminista', or a 'ruptura de las ataduras socio-históricas impuestas al arte de algún modo por el feminismo' (*El ojo de la noche*, p. 10). Following on these and other writers such as Aida Bahr and Marilyn Bobes, the fiction of several Cuban *novísimas* and *postnovísimas*, that is to say women who began to publish in the mid-1980s and 1990s respectively, has

<sup>101</sup> Cited in Catherine Davies, *A Place in the Sun? Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1997, p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> *El ojo de la noche: Nuevas cuentistas cubanas*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1999, p. 11.

moved beyond this extreme feminist tone and become less emphatic on gender issues, just as in Puerto Rico.

The emergence as a literary tradition of the marginalised, minority current within the regional production that is women's writing was further disadvantaged by the problem of limited readership discussed above. Yet there is a female tradition, which Evelyn O'Callaghan characterises as one of diversity and openness, reflecting the social complexity of the region.<sup>103</sup> Women writers, O'Callaghan contends, generally display a tendency to 'resist political labels, seeing them as limiting and inappropriate', 'a distrust of the "rarefied" nature of literary theory' (pp. 36-37). Consequently, they are 'working towards a [...] theoretical position which paradoxically refuses rigid definition' (p. 41). This allows for a multiplicity of female voices, which all evidence a commitment to 'an ideology of change, to the necessity for exposing and subverting inequalities in [Caribbean] societies and – sometimes – suggesting ways in which transformations might come about' (p. 42). O'Callaghan points out, however, that their profound reluctance to elaborate monolithic theories does not rule out women writers' participation in theoretical debates. Arnold likewise notes 'a clear aversion to theorizing their project' in French Antillean women; when they do 'articulat[e] a theoretical position', as in the case of Bébel-Gisler, 'it is fundamentally a socio-political one' ('The Gendering of *créolité*', p. 36).

Mirta Yáñez also identifies as a unifying factor of the otherwise richly diverse literary production by Cuban women a specific culture, 'con sus códigos y sus propias resonancias', inherited from its long tradition of marginalisation (*Estatuas de sal*, p. 12). Belinda Edmondson corroborates this point, singling out what she calls 'oppositionality' as the chief characteristic of Caribbean women's discourse. She notes that, just as the literary canon now prevailing in the Caribbean was shaped as a response to metropolitan and white Creole texts, the female tradition has emerged from a desire to challenge not only this Eurocentrism, but also the newly elaborated canon, because it remains male-centred.<sup>104</sup> This is examined further in chapter four. Their reluctance to theorise can therefore be interpreted as a women writers' move to distance themselves from the hitherto masculinist discourses of the

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<sup>103</sup> In ' "It's all about ideology: there's no discussion about art": Reluctant Voyages into Theory in Caribbean Women's Writing', *Kunapipi* 14: 2 (1992), pp. 35-44, p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> 'The Canon, the West Indian Writer, and the Novel', *op. cit.*

region, favouring instead a plurality of literary voices, what Arnold terms, with specific reference to the French Antilles, writing outside the 'teleological project' ('The Gendering of *créolité*', pp. 39-40). Michael Dash shares this view:

With good reason, women writers are acutely aware of the negative, and even neurotic, consequences of powerlessness. It should then come as no surprise that the strength of their contribution to Caribbean literature lies in their capacity to interrogate and demystify systems of total explanation. [...] this tradition is arguably at its best when it takes an irreverent stand against all totalizing and centering systems (*The Other America*, p. 109).

A good illustration of women's reservations about labels and theorisation in the Americas is their attitude towards feminism. Many Caribbean, African-American and Latin American women writers express a certain suspicion towards Western and Anglo-US feminist theories, which they generally regard as irrelevant to their own situation and cultural specificities. By and large, they connect women's liberation movements to socio-political struggles, as illustrated in Alice Walker's womanism and the activism of Angela Davis in the United States. Rhoda Reddock thus sees the Caribbean movement for female emancipation as 'firmly based within the sociopolitical and historical context of this region'.<sup>105</sup> Yet rejecting feminist theories does not rule out feminist activism: Wilson notes that 'Beaucoup de romancières ont été [...] impliquées de façon très active dans des organisations ou des groupes de femmes qui s'intéressaient à réformer le rôle et le statut de la femme'.<sup>106</sup> Typical of this paradox is Maryse Condé who, despite an evident concern for women and

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<sup>105</sup> Rhoda Reddock, 'Feminism, Nationalism, and the Early Women's Movement in the English-Speaking Caribbean (with Special Reference to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago)', in *Caribbean Women Writers*, ed. by Selwyn R. Cudjoe, Wellesley (Mass.): Calaloux Publications, 1990.

Myriam Chancy thus shows in *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997) how under the American Occupation 'Haitian women's emancipation rest[ed] upon the cessation of American influences and on the disruption of sexist stereotypes that result[ed] in the objectification of Haitian women'. This feminist tradition became more radical after 1934, because women writers have subsequently had 'to contend both with the legacy of the Occupation and with the anti-women, anti-feminist practices of the Duvalier regime', characterised by 'unmatched violence directed against women' (p. 71).

<sup>106</sup> 'Bibliographie', pp. 20-21. Wilson cites in particular the example of the Guadeloupean Jacqueline Manicom. Virgile Valcin, considered to be the first woman novelist in Haiti, was one of the founders of the Ligue Féminine Nationale d'Haïti and of the feminist journal *Voix des femmes* (1934 to 1935). Marie-Thérèse Colimon, perhaps the most prominent woman writer alive within Haiti and author of numerous essays on women's issues, was president of the Ligue Féminine d'Action Sociale, an organisation with a crucial role regarding female secondary education and women's civil and political rights. Similarly in the Dominican Republic, writers such as Angela Hernández and Chiqui Vicioso, as well as Carmen Imbert, Ylonka Nacidit Perdomo and Marisela Rizik, have been involved in women's groups and/or feminist criticism. Early Cuban feminist activists include writers such as La Condesa de Merlín, 'one of Cuba's protofeminists' according to K. Lynn Stoner, and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, involved in the feminist press from 1859 (*From the House to the Street*, p. 15 and pp. 16-17).



women writers in her fiction and literary criticism, does not define herself as a feminist.<sup>107</sup>

Writing against the male canon, then, has favoured the emergence of a distinctive female literary voice. The theme of identity, envisaged both from an individual and collective (or national) perspective, is central to all of Caribbean writing. Yet because identity has been almost exclusively designed by and for men, this theme acquires a dimension of oppositionality in fiction by women writers, as will be shown in this study. Thus chapter one evidences the revision of female stereotypes undertaken in their fiction, while chapter two brings to light their project to re-inscribe the female presence in the Caribbean past; whereas chapters three and four centre on the notion of 'oppositonality' in relation to the elaboration of a literary voice that is distinctively Caribbean and the major postcolonial identity discourses respectively, the final chapter examines how the constant interrogation of tropes of the Caribbean literary tradition such as those of identity and exile has led to a redefinition of these concepts in women's writing. Presumably, as the mainstream canon becomes less male-centred under the influence of the *combativas*, 'oppositonality' will gradually cease to be a distinctive feature of women's writing. But if this evolution towards the *combatiente* phase already begins to be sensed in the Hispanic Caribbean, the Francophone region is still a long way from it.

Some Caribbeanists regard the diversity of the Caribbean as superior to its unity, consequently arguing that the differences, particularly those between the Hispanic Caribbean and the rest of the region, are so great that the literature produced in these two areas are not comparable. Given the factors enumerated above, however, this study will support the contrary view and explore the mutual influence and affinities between Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean literature. The next chapter will examine how Caribbean women's fiction is, in O'Callaghan's words, 'committed to an ideology of change', in its denunciation of male brutality towards women.

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<sup>107</sup> When asked in 1991 whether she was a feminist, Condé replied: 'On m'a demandé cela cent fois et je ne sais même pas ce que cela veut dire exactement, alors je ne pense pas l'être. Si tu poses la question aux USA, on te dira sûrement non' (*Entretiens avec Maryse Condé*, p. 47).

## 1

## From Objects to Subjects: Images of Women in Caribbean Writing

A Eurocentric artistic and literary imagination has long fixed non-Western women as exotic and erotic objects. The 'historical' and fictional representations of Afro-Caribbean women were part of a colonial discourse seeking to legitimise the enslavement of Africans – the sole survivors available for Western exploitation in the archipelago from the sixteenth century – by relegating them to bestiality. Mystifying the blacks' sexuality was a most effective way of achieving their dehumanisation, and the Caribbean black woman was thus constructed as an irrational wanton. In this respect she was opposed to the white Creole, invariably characterised by virginal purity. As for the mixed-raced woman, she gradually became the embodiment of sensuality. In reality, such a racial categorisation aimed to palliate the acute shortage of white women in the early colonial period, the slaveholders' sexual claims on their female slaves being conveniently validated by this alleged promiscuity. Such representations pervaded the elaboration of Caribbean literary canons. Thus Condé notes the persistence of numerous racial stereotypes in early male-authored postcolonial<sup>1</sup> writing, by contrast with

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'postcolonial' does not refer to a specific chronological *period*, but to an ideological and historical *process*. In their *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York/London: Routledge, 1995), Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that 'all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem' (p. 2). They define postcolonialism as: 'projects of counter-colonial resistance which drew

contemporaneous texts by women (*Entretiens avec Maryse Condé*, pp. 32-33).<sup>2</sup> While the depictions of black men as threatening studs or servile simpletons were gradually revised, conventional portrayals of Caribbean women, however, were left largely unchallenged by the mostly male writers who emerged between the 1920s and 1950s, even when these were often non-white and as revolutionary as Nicolás Guillén or Aimé Césaire. After a brief examination of the prevalent images of women in male writing up to the 1970s, and an outline of some women writers' responses in the 1970s and 1980s, this chapter will examine the revision of stereotypes of women in the fiction of Gisèle Pineau, Ana Luz García Calzada, Edwidge Danticat, Julia Álvarez, and Mayra Santos.

### **Wantons, Mothers and the Nation: pre-1970s images of Caribbean women**

Early Caribbean literature, above all poetry, generally focuses on women of (partially) African ancestry, who emerge as erotic figures objectified by male desire. The frequent use of food imagery – especially fruits, which often acquire sexual connotations in the Caribbean – to depict non-white women emphasises their status as objects of pleasure designed for male senses. This tradition has particularly infused Haitian and Cuban writing.<sup>3</sup> Léon-François Hoffmann comments: 'Il est surprenant de voir les générations de poètes haïtiens trouver, pour décrire la femme, des images "botaniques" '. By contrast with the French canon, he adds, in Haitian poetry there is not simply a comparison, but a real identification of the woman with fruit and flowers.

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upon the many different indigenous local and hybrid *processes* of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge' (p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> The work of the Puerto Rican Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (1826-1882), for example, his novel *Póstumo el transmigrado* (1872), displays signs of early feminism, as does José Martí's call for social justice in Cuba, regardless of gender and colour. But these exceptions only confirm the rule. In the Anglophone writing of the decolonisation period, Daryl Cumber Dance likewise notes a stereotypical pattern in female characterisation: the black woman is usually represented as a 'matriarch', the Indo-Caribbean woman as a 'dove' and the white woman as a 'nympho'. See 'Matriarchs, Doves and Nymphs: Prevalent Images of Black, Indian and White Women in Caribbean Literature', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 26: 2 (1993), pp. 21-31.

<sup>3</sup> This aspect is fully developed in Hoffmann's 'Image de la femme dans la poésie haïtienne' (*Présence Africaine* 32-33, pp. 183-206) as well as Régine Latortue's 'The Black Woman in Haitian Society and Literature' (*The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, ed. by Filomina Chioma Steady, *op. cit.*, pp. 535-563) in relation to Haiti, in Vera Kutzinski's *Sugar's Secrets* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1993) for Cuba, and in G.R. Coulthard's *Raza y color en la literatura antillana*, *op. cit.*, which examines the literature of the three main linguistic areas.

What is most disturbing is the persistence of such a characterisation in Caribbean literature until so recently. Thus, despite the homage paid to the Afro-Cuban woman in 'Mujer nueva', in many of Nicolás Guillén's poems (including 'Mujer nueva'), women are envisaged solely as objects of male desire. This is particularly clear in 'Secuestro de la mujer de Antonio', for instance, where the woman (nameless, like any piece of a man's belongings) is turned into a commodity ready for male consumption: 'te voy a beber de un trago'. On occasions, women are reduced to the state of animals: for example in 'Rumba', the dancing *mulata*'s hips are called 'grupa', while in 'Madrigal', she is seen as a love-making being devoid of reason: 'Tu vientre sabe más que tu cabeza / y tanto como tus muslos'. In other poems, women (often *mulatas*) are portrayed either as money-driven – as in 'Sóngoro consongo' – or as alienated characters who fully embrace white colonial values and despise their own African origins – as in 'Mulata' and 'El abuelo'.

Alienation, it is true, is not the prerogative of women in Guillén's poetry: in 'Negro bembón', it is a male character who takes offence at the derisive emphasis put on his African features. Nevertheless, it is significant that virtually none of Guillén's poems before the 1970s presents a woman who is a full subject. Only then was Guillén able to produce pieces like his 'Angela Davis', where the woman is no longer a sensual object or an alienated subject. This naturally raises questions about the poet's conception of the role of women (especially mixed-raced women) in the elaboration of the Cuban nation and culture, all the more so since, with the exception of 'Mujer nueva', 'Un son para niños antillanos' and 'Guitarra' (where the guitar could be interpreted as a feminine symbol), women are conspicuously absent from his verse dealing with the cultural identity of the island: 'Llegada', 'La canción del bongó', 'Balada de los dos abuelos', 'Son número 6', among his most acclaimed work, all feature men. As Vera Kutzinski argues in *Sugar's Secrets*, this absence is striking in 'Balada de los dos abuelos', where the poet only takes into account his male genealogy. This point will be examined shortly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Equally phallogentric are Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* and *El siglo de las luces*, which are eloquent on the male *persona*'s hyper-virility. Again, as Luisa Campuzano notes in 'La mujer en la narrativa de la revolución', it was only with the changes introduced by the revolution that Carpentier felt the need to adopt a less masculine point of view: *La consagración de la primavera* (1978) is dominated by a female voice. A. James Arnold makes similar comments in relation to Depestre's *Le mât de cocagne* (1979), where he notes 'une vision manichéiste du monde antillais [...] où les rôles dévolus aux deux sexes sont étrangement traditionnels' ('Poétique forcée et identité dans la littérature des Antilles francophones', p. 23, in *L'héritage de Caliban*, ed. by M. Condé, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-27). The Haitian Dany Lafférière likewise fully assumes 'Caliban's virile heritage'

When not reduced to the function of pleasure, Caribbean women frequently feature as strong, resourceful matriarchs who reach mythical proportions. This representation is certainly rooted in the social reality of the Caribbean, where women (biological or substitute mothers) are the central figures of many households. George Lamming's autobiographical protagonist thus says of his mother in *In the Castle of My Skin* (1954) that she both mothered and fathered him, while Aimé Césaire in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) recalls his mother pedalling her sewing machine day and night to support her numerous children. As for Juan Bosch's Remigia in 'Dos pesos de agua' (1941), she relinquishes all she has in order to save her grandson. Yet many Caribbean sociologists have pointed out the partial inaccuracy of such stereotypes, all the more pernicious, in that they encourage men to take little responsibility towards their offspring.<sup>5</sup>

The mother is sometimes a hateful figure, as in 'En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado' (1959), by the Puerto Rican René Marqués. In this story, a man is rowing a boat on a San Juan lake, while reminiscing about his childhood and disastrous marriage. Here there are two matriarchal figures, the wife and the mother: both are depicted as materialistic and emasculating, and their values clash with the more idealistic aspirations of the protagonist. Because of his wife's greed he runs into debt, and her domineering behaviour stifles his personal growth. He feels that he has been governed by women throughout his life: first by his mother, and then by his wife and the headmistress of the school where he teaches, and even by his doctor, the mayor who demands that he keeps the city clean, and the senator who asks him to vote for her. He therefore resorts to poisoning his wife to put an end to this humiliation; and for the first time, on the boat from which he throws the body overboard, he feels that he is in control. Yet this power is only illusory, and in the final scene he castrates himself. So here the mythical mother figure acquires nightmarish proportions. Interestingly, the female presence has been totally erased: the mother having died years before, only the wife appears in the text, and in the form of the corpse on the stern of the boat.

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(Arnold, p. 23) in his first novel *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (Montreal: VLB éditeur, 1985, rpt. 1989), and his latest, *Je suis fatigué* (Outremont, Quebec, Canada: Lanctôt éditeur, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Edith Clarke's *My Mother Who Fathered Me* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957) on Jamaican family patterns, and Lucille Mathurin's 'Reluctant matriarchs', *Savacou* 13 (Mona, Jamaica, 1977), pp. 1-6, as well as Olive Senior, interviewed by Anna Rutherford in *Kunapipi* 8. 2 (1986, University of Aarhus, Denmark), pp. 16-17.

It is almost invariably the darker-skinned woman who is portrayed as a loving and self-sacrificing mother. Yet, with a few notable exceptions, she is seldom fully characterised by male authors.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, the lighter-skinned mixed-raced woman is often portrayed as unloving, alienated from her offspring by her too close association with white cultural and social values. In Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*,<sup>7</sup> for instance, the black doña Chon's common sense and moral strength is set out against the alienation of the more racially mixed La China. And while the latter is musing about her idol Iris Chacón and reflecting on how to extort money from her wealthy lover, her son, left to his own devices in the playground, is run over by a car.

As in many cultures worldwide, and perhaps through the frequent association of women with motherhood, the woman in Caribbean literature has come to stand as a symbol for the nation. Because her phenotype suggests little association with the white world, the black woman has often been hailed as a paragon of integrity and authenticity: she embodies the African cultural legacy to the Caribbean. She has therefore functioned as a signifier of the emerging nation, particularly in times when the West threatens it, such as during independence struggles or US occupation. Hoffmann remarks in relation to Haiti: 'il aurait été surprenant que la Nègresse n'eût pas également assumé valeur de symbole. Symbole à la fois national et racial, car à travers la poésie haïtienne, la revendication raciale est le plus souvent une expression de patriotisme' (p. 192). Nevertheless, Hoffmann points out, 'la femme qui incarne pour [l'écrivain haïtien] la réalité nationale, c'est la Mûlatresse, l'Antillaise symbole de l'individualité originale issue de l'amalgame' (pp. 195-96).<sup>8</sup>

In Cuba, the *mulata*, lighter-skinned than her Haitian counterpart, likewise embodies the nation, and here too *mestizaje* symbolises the racial synthesis of the Caribbean people and the emergence of a new Caribbean identity, as discussed in the introduction. Yet the *mulata* can be an ambiguous symbol: she can equally signify frivolity, together with alienation and cultural assimilation, as noted above in

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<sup>6</sup> Such exceptions are Désira, Man Tine and Remigia, immortalised by Jacques Roumain in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, Joseph Zobel in *La rue Cases-nègres* and Pedro Juan Soto's Nana Luisa in *Usmail*.

<sup>7</sup> Ediciones de la Flor, Buenos Aires, 1976, rpt. by Casa de las Américas, Havana, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> In Haiti 'mulatto' designates a dark-skinned person with relatively straight hair (see Hoffmann, pp. 195-196).

Guillén. Interestingly, the *mulato* or the black man rarely embodies the island in male writing: this use of the female figure as a metaphor for the nation is in stark contrast with Guillén's nationalistic poems, for instance, where the *mulato* or *negro bembón* transcends the symbolic status to become a character in his own right. These models of national identity are thus constructed primarily for men.

In Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, because of the way in which the elites of these islands have conventionally envisaged their ethnic and cultural identity, it is usually the white peasant woman who represents the nation. In Juan Bosch's 'Dos pesos de agua', for instance, Remigia incarnates the resilience of Dominican peasantry. Yet her capacity for endurance ultimately leads her to her downfall. Some writers have challenged such ethnic representation of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Luis Palés thus envisages Puerto Rico as a 'Mulata Antilia', like the rest of the archipelago. His compatriot Pedro Juan Soto likewise pictures the black Nana Luisa as the true representative of the country's cultural values in *Usmail* (1959).

Such gender symbolism has had wide implications with respect to the construction of nationalism in the regional writing. The Caribbean has traditionally been represented as feminine, especially in poetry. Michael Dash notes how 'Stereotypes of a helpless femininity have fixed the French Caribbean in a dependent relationship with the metropole. Martinique emerges as the kept woman of the French empire'.<sup>9</sup> In this imperialist discourse, gender symbolism provides a justification for the metropolitan claim on the Caribbean: the powerful nation's duty is to protect (or subject) the colony. Here again, the feminine is the object of desire. Yet by expressing their patriotism in terms of a love relationship, many Caribbean writers have unwittingly perpetuated this colonial rhetoric. Thus in Césaire, the re-discovery of African roots and the native land necessary to the emergence of a positive sense of identity is expressed in gendered terms: Africa is invariably referred to as 'Mother Africa' and the Caribbean as *motherland*, the quest for a collective cultural identity thus paralleling, it seems, Freud's model of identity quest for the male subject. And this largely applies to most *négritude* poetry, and in fact to most pan-Africanist writing. Susan Andrade remarks:

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<sup>9</sup> 'Writing the Body: Edouard Glissant's Poetics of Re-membering', p. 78, in *L'héritage de Caliban*, ed. by Maryse Condé, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-83.

In the texts of many [male writers], the land itself, whether it be so-called 'mother' Africa or a newly refigured Caribbean island, is fundamentally gendered, both feminized and (hetero)sexualized. Often the relationship between female characters and the land or nation appears unmediated, the latter standing for the former, rendered as either maternal and inviting or virginal and raped. This inscription of the feminine repeats, albeit rhetorically, the same territorializing and sexualizing actions of the colonizers (p. 214).<sup>10</sup>

This tendency is found across Caribbean literature. Many are the regional male writers who have subverted the conventional metaphor of a feminine and vulnerable Caribbean in colonial writing by using it to signify the exploitation of the region by Western powers. Thus Hoffmann notes how in post-1930 Haitian writing, the black woman commonly appears as 'une autre victime de l'injustice et de l'inégalité' (p. 193), symbolising the oppressed nation.<sup>11</sup> Such representation, Dash comments, is also found in Glissant: 'The land is seen as a woman "violée dans son lait tendre", and Glissant's project is to narrate this violated maternity' ('Writing the Body', p. 79). Conversely, in the opening of Jacques Stephen Alexis's *Compère-général Soleil* (1955), poverty itself is compared to a mad, destitute woman: 'La misère est une femme folle, vous dis-je. Je la connais bien, la garce, je l'ai vue traîner dans les capitales, les villes, les faubourgs de la moitié de la terre. Cette femelle enragée est la même partout' (pp. 7-8).

The feminisation of the island in Césaire's *Cahier* likewise stems from the poet's frustration with its socio-political status: 'merveilleusement couché le corps de mon pays dans le désespoir de mes bras, ses os ébranlés, et dans ses veines, le sang qui hésite comme la goutte de lait végétal à la pointe blessée du bulbe...' (p. 56). The poem poignantly evokes the Caribbean as a frail chain of islands, yet again feminised and eroticised: 'l'archipel arqué comme le désir inquiet de se nier, on dirait une anxiété maternelle pour protéger la ténuité plus délicate qui sépare l'une de l'autre Amérique; et ses flancs qui secrètent pour l'Europe la bonne liqueur d'un Gulf Stream' (p. 24). Here the two representations of the woman as object of desire and as archetypal mother conflate with the image of helplessness to underline the ongoing exploitation of the Caribbean.

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<sup>10</sup> 'The Nigger of the Narcissist: History, Sexuality and Intertextuality in Maryse Condé's *Hérémakhonon*', *Callaloo* 16. 1 (1993), pp. 213-226.

<sup>11</sup> Marjorie Thorpe also comments in relation to V.S. Naipaul: 'The vulnerability of the woman in the male-dominated West Indian society is therefore an effective symbol for the vulnerability of these small, island societies' ('Beyond the Sargasso: The Significance of the Presentation of the Woman in the West Indian Novel', Ph.D diss., Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, Canada, October 1975, pp. v-vi).



Yet in much of this writing, femininity can also suggest servility. Thus in the first part of Césaire's *Cahier*, the feminine acquires a negative connotation, it becomes repulsive. Martinique is described as submissive and feminine symbols dominate. Even the crowd in Fort-de-France, whose chief characteristic is its submission and inability to revolt, 'cette étrange foule [...] habile à découvrir le point de désencastration, de fuite, d'esquive', 'cette foule qui ne sait pas faire foule' (p. 9), seems made up primarily of women. As Sita Dickson Littlewood notes in 'Le symbolisme de la féminité dans la quête d'identité de Aimé Césaire', the occasional references to masculinity at the beginning of the poem present it as powerless: an 'accidentel palmier', a 'germe durci'. The country has been emasculated by colonisation.

By contrast, the second part of the poem, centring on revolt, is governed by the male principle. The poet talks of 'mâle soif' for justice (p. 23) – echoed later on in the poet's 'prière virile' for social and political change (p. 51) –, of Toussaint's heroism, and in a simile full of male eroticism, the Congo River is envisioned as a powerful force generating rebellion. Such symbolic use of gender, however, is transcended at the end of the poem, where the masculine and the feminine unite in a fecund act resulting in the birth of a new nation.<sup>12</sup> Yet despite this final reconciliation, the implicit connection of submissiveness and otherness with femininity that initially pervades the poem is, as in Guillén's portrayals of the alienated *mulata*, highly problematic for the Caribbean woman and female *persona*.

Similar observations can be made in relation to the symbolic use of the woman in the Puerto Rican poet Ivan Silén. Here Filí-Melé becomes the destitute San Juan and Puerto Rico: 'tu cuerpo es un cementerio/ [...] un jardín florido de gritos/ [...] una-bandera-rota-de-pájaros-rotos' (*Los poemas de Filí-Melé*, p. 30). Alfredo Villanueva Collado comments: 'Filí-Melé, mujer-isla-ciudad, ha resultado ser estéril; no puede producir generaciones futuras. [...] ella termina convertida en un paisaje degenerado y prostituido'.<sup>13</sup> She is eventually identified with a prostitute. Thus, although the progression of the poem is reversed, here as in Césaire's *Cahier*

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<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of Césaire's poetry, see Robert Jouanny's *Espaces littéraires d'Afrique et d'Amérique 1* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996) and Sita Dickson Littlewood's article in *ASCALF Yearbook 1* (1996, ed. by Peter Hawkins, Universities of Bristol and Southampton, pp. 46-63).

<sup>13</sup> In 'Filí-Melé: Símbolo y mujer en la poesía de Luis Palés Matos e Iván Silén', p. 52, *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 10: 4 (Fall 1982), University of Houston, pp. 47-54.

the feminine is associated with the servile, destitute Caribbean. As Villanueva Collado puts it, these metaphors 'presentan un concepto operante negativo de lo femenino', and he warns that the fusion of the political and the erotic could lead to such a degree of symbiosis that 'al describir acertadamente una situación política, un poeta como Silén sea llevado por el lenguaje a la expresión de una posición derogatoria del principio femenino' (p. 54).<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Caribbean fiction is replete with materialistic and shallow women blindly surrendering to the imperialist consumerism and ideological values championed by the (neo)colonial power.<sup>15</sup> Besides Guillén's early *mulatas*, Marqués's mother and wife in the story discussed above, and Luis Rafael Sánchez's La China, Mayotte Capécia's heroines face the same accusation in the highly reductionistic reading Fanon made of her fiction in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, as discussed in the introduction. Thus woman comes to signify duplicity and compromise with the colonial power. Such a conception informs the patriotism of many Caribbean intellectuals, notably Marqués and even Glissant in his earlier theoretical work. As discussed in the next chapter, their writing reveals both a conviction that the nationalist struggle is a fundamentally masculine task and a distrust in women as potential traitors. This last notion, which can be traced back to the Mexican figure of *la Malinche*, is already implicit in Guillén's alienated *mulata* and Césaire's first reference to a woman in *Cahier* as 'une femme qui ment'.

Where she does not conveniently disappear behind the nation she is meant to symbolise, or figure as duplicitous and treacherous, the woman appears as passive. Thus the *coumbite* appraised in Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* is a gender-divided practice whereby men work outdoors while women toil in the kitchen.

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<sup>14</sup> Dayan also notes how for a Derek Walcott or a V.S. Naipaul facing the 'lapses, opportunism, and false compromises of his island' woman becomes 'the vessel for all that is dirty, rotting, and false' ('Caribbean Cannibals and Whores', p. 51, *Raritan* 92 (1989-1990), pp. 45-67).

<sup>15</sup> In 'Ideology and Images of Women in Contemporary Puerto Rican Literature' (in her *The Puerto Rican Woman*, New York: Praeger, 1979, pp. 85-109) Edna Acosta-Belén shows how writing by the so-called Generation of the 1950s, in particular René Marqués, the early José Luis González (whose portrayals of women was to change radically in his later fiction), and even some of the fiction of Pedro Juan Soto and Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, has contributed to the perpetuation of such negative stereotypes. The critic argues that these nationalist writers have usually depicted the US influence on Puerto Rican society and its consequence on female emancipation as negative, since it upset the existing traditional values, which they regard as the only guarantors of Puerto Rican identity. Therefore, their writing alternatively features the woman as weak or domineering, but invariably responsible for the man's tragedy. The woman can only be positive when she remains traditional; the more liberated woman is viewed either as castrating or depraved. Acosta-Belén concludes: 'When she does not conform, she usually represents some form of social or moral deterioration. Strong female images are prevalent only within a traditional context' (p. 104).

Roumain's descriptions of *coumbites* invariably centre on the men, which somehow minimises the women's contribution to the community.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the novel, Annaïse and Désira are presented as Manuel's *auxiliaries*, not as central agents of the construction of the peasant community's future. Dayan points out how in *négritude* poetry the woman is rendered invisible by the instrumental role she is ascribed: 'the required plunge into the depths [for social change] remained a male endeavor: the woman mere passage to [the poet's] song. [The Négritude] call to transcendence, with the iconic *femme noire* in tow, condemned woman in the Caribbean to a crushing loss of presence' (pp. 49-50). Women thus find themselves excluded from nation-building process in the Caribbean literary imagination. Sam Haigh likewise remarks: 'the symbolic function of "woman" in the discourses of negritude and of nationalism leads to the exclusion of women as such from the nation'.<sup>17</sup>

Joëlle Hullebroeck reaches similar conclusions in relation to female figures in Bosch, while Jacques André notes that in Glissant's work 'Les femmes "réelles" ne sont que de peu de poids et le conflit ne naît jamais d'elles'.<sup>18</sup> Glissant's poetic system, based on a dichotomy hills/plains and masculinity/femininity will be further discussed in the next chapter. Through their frequent representation as passive and/or alienated in canonical Caribbean writing, women are therefore largely excluded from the nationalist struggle. The reaction to the countless depictions of women as sensual, maternal or alienated/passive has been relatively slow. Women writers in the 1970s through the 1990s, however, thoroughly revised these stereotypes, even challenging those institutions that traditionally earned women respect in Caribbean societies, notably motherhood. Most of all, they counteracted the conventionally evasive portrayals of women in male writing with a detailed picture of their realities.

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<sup>16</sup> The collective voice that emerges from Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept misères* (1986) is likewise very clearly male-dominated. Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* responded by offering a collective voice issuing from a community of women, those of the Lougandor family. As transpires from the first part of the novel, the female ancestors are the key figures of Télumée's lineage.

<sup>17</sup> *Mapping a Tradition: Francophone Women's Writing from Guadeloupe*, London: Maney Publishing, MHRA texts and dissertations, vol. 48, 2000, p. 72. Régine Latortue reiterates this point in relation to the Haitian canon (*op. cit.*, p. 542).

<sup>18</sup> Joëlle Hullebroeck, 'La mujer en los cuentos de Juan Bosch: sombra omnipresente' *La mujer en la literatura caribeña*, ed. by Lloyd King, pp. 151-167; Jacques André, *Caraïbales: Études sur la littérature antillaise*, Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1981, p. 148. The figure of the maroon is examined in the next chapter, while the aspect of symbolic geography is analysed in more detail in chapter four.

### Towards a sense of self: Caribbean women's fiction

In the Francophone area, women's writing long conformed to the view of the tragic *mulâtresse* who – largely because of the authors' social origins – almost invariably occupies the centre stage of their fiction. Usually, the *mulâtresse* both desires and is desired by the white man, either metropolitan or Creole, which again perpetuates her representation as alienated and coveted by the colonial other. Yet some early women writers contested such stereotypes. Suzanne Lacascade's Claire-Solange, for instance, takes pride in her African ancestry. Far from being portrayed either as pure and innocent or as sexual objects, Claire and Annette in Marie Chauvet's *Amour* are full subjects determined to take control of their own sexuality, even though they fail in their enterprise. In this respect, they are played against their sister Eugénie, a paragon of the mulatto woman, and effectively the object of the Frenchman's desire, the one Jean-Luze marries. Eugénie, however, is portrayed in a negative light, qualified by Claire as 'insipid'. In *Colère*, Rose likewise defies the mythical figure of the helpless *mulâtresse* when she agrees to trade her chastity for respite from political persecution. She thereby not only ensures the salvation of her family, but also takes control of her own sexuality, albeit in a pernicious way.

Similarly because of the authors' social extraction, pre-1970s women's fiction in the Hispanic Caribbean centres on white Creole female protagonists and offers few images of non-white women.<sup>19</sup> One early unconventional female portrait is Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo's Rosario in *La muñeca*. Far from being depicted as a victim, Rosario is shown to truly enjoy the role she has been ascribed by society, that of a decorative object. She was inculcated to worship her own appearance, and indulges in this task. Thus the angel has turned into a devil: her narcissism makes her callous and totally empty. Her passion for luxurious dresses and jewelry leads her husband to bankruptcy and suicide. Yet Rosario is not presented as his victimiser: completely oblivious of others, she remains unaware of her husband's financial situation even after his death. Socialised into believing that her sole preoccupation ought to be her own image, she remains unaffected by his suicide. Here the author does not so much

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<sup>19</sup> One of the few well-known portrayals of the *mulata* before the 1970s is found in the *negrista* poetry of Julia de Burgos. Unlike in Palés Matos, in 'Ay! Ay! Ay! Grifa negra', the mixed-race *persona* is no longer invoked to suggest sensuality, but to denounce a past of exploitation and slavery.

denounce Rosario's frivolity as the sexism of the elite, leading men to treat women as precious possessions valued primarily for their appearance. Such gender socialisation is held as directly responsible for women's alienation.

From the 1970s, positive self-images emerge with more frequency, as a new generation of fiction writers irrupted on to the literary scene and joined their precursors to challenge the long-lasting characterisation of Caribbean women as exotic, erotic, and alienated. Yet the pervasive influence of female stereotypes in Caribbean literature can be assessed by the occasional relapse of some of these later authors into such characterisation. Even challenging writers such as Maryse Condé, Rosario Ferré and Mayra Santos have in some works drawn on stereotypes which they have questioned elsewhere. Thus the racial characterisation noted by Cumber Dance is partly reproduced in Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*: the mixed-race Mira is sensual and attractive, the Indo-Caribbeans Rosa and Vilma are submissive, and the black Man Sonson represents the matriarch. However, stereotypes are avoided through the psychological depth and non-conformism of these characters.

Ferré likewise seeks to challenge the image of the Afro-Caribbean woman as sensual in 'Cuando las mujeres aman a los hombres' (*Papeles de Pandora*) by fusing into one character a white, upper-class widow with her mulatto homonym, a prostitute who was also her late husband's mistress. Yet despite provocative statements such as 'Nosotras, tu querida y tu mujer, siempre hemos sabido que debajo de cada dama de sociedad se oculta una prostituta' (p. 27), Ferré falls short of her original purpose, because she effectively depicts her black character (quite rare in her writing) as again promiscuous. 'Maquinolanderá' features three black female protagonists, all fictional versions of famous Puerto Rican popular artists. In this story, Ferré is thus able to offer complementary and more complex images of black women. Yet her depiction of the sex symbol Iris Chacón as a revolutionary model for the Afro-Puerto Rican underclass remains problematic, as analysed by Marie Ramos Rosado in *La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña*. Certainly more disturbing is Santos's depiction of Aurelia as again a sensual *mulata* in 'Resinas para Aurelia' (*El cuerpo correcto*), because it comes from one of the rare Afro-Puerto Rican women writers, whose journalistic and poetic writing deals extensively

with the racial issue, and who has challenged racial prejudice elsewhere in her fiction, notably in 'Marina y su olor' (*Pez de vidrio*).<sup>20</sup>

If the image of the strong, domineering matriarch remains central to women's writing until now, in its female versions the matriarch is no flat character, but emerges in all her complexity. In some cases, as in Edwidge Danticat's Martine in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* discussed in chapter four, the author seeks to trace the roots of the mother's dominating behaviour back to her social context.<sup>21</sup> In Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the mother is balanced by the more positive figure of the grandmother, as examined in chapter five.<sup>22</sup> In Gisèle Pineau's *L'Espérance-macadam* and García Calzada's *Minimal son* (and in García too), the mother's strength is disclosed as more apparent than real, as will be shown shortly.

Many women writers have also sought to dismantle the representation of the Caribbean and Africa as *motherlands*. Thus in Ana Lydia Vega's 'Encancaranublado', Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico are represented as four men 'on the same boat'. The responses elaborated by Condé, Warner-Vieyra and Dracius-Pinalie to Caribbeanist and pan-Africanist theories that have fixed the native land as female, thereby making it virtually impossible for the female subject to undergo a successful identity quest, are discussed in chapter four. In Schwarz-Bart, on the other hand, this trope associating the female body to the landscape is recuperated: Télumée talks of herself as 'la rivière Balata' and 'la Guadeloupe toute entière', and the text links her to the landscape through botanical and other natural imagery. But instead of leading to the erasure of the female protagonist, here the process reinforces her presence in the text. Pineau likewise appropriates the trope in 'Paroles de terre en larmes'. Through this technique, she stresses the exploitation of Caribbean women by their male companions:

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<sup>20</sup> *Papeles de Pandora*, Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1976; *Pez de vidrio*, Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1996 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1995); *El cuerpo correcto*, R&R Editoras, 1998. See also Marie Ramos Rosado's *La mujer negra en la literatura puertorriqueña: cuentística del setenta*, Río Piedras: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1999, for a discussion on Ferré's representation of black women.

<sup>21</sup> This is also the case of Julia Álvarez's Laura in *How the García Girls lost their accents* and *¡Yo!*, and Paule Marshall's Silla in *Brown Girl Brownstones*. Jamaica Kincaid uses the relationship mother/daughter as a metaphor for that between mothercountry and colony. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, see my master's dissertation, 'At Home and Abroad: the Emergence of Feminine Identity in Selected Fiction by Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall', Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, 1996. The image of the mother also dominates the work of African-American writers, notably Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

<sup>22</sup> The same dynamic is at work in Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent* and Kincaid's fiction.

*Jour de lessive....* Quelle belle couche que le lit la rivière!  
*Jour de jardin...* - 'Viens fouiller des patates!' Mon corps est *la seule terre qu'il travaille*, qu'il laboure, qu'il sarcle et qu'il remue. Une terre brune et légère qu'il sème, *chaque jour que Dieu fait*. *La récolte n'est pas son souci*, ma terre le nourrit si bien qu'il n'a jamais faim. *Ma terre, il la prend dans ses mains et la jette aux alizés....* Et toujours, il l'arrose. *Toujours*, sa sueur chaude sur mes seins, mon ventre, mes cuisses (p. 8, emphasis added).

Instead of the poetry usually conveyed by such comparisons, here Pineau's metaphors are sarcastic. While the protagonist is toiling away, the sole occupation of her companion Maxime is to satisfy his sexual appetite, to her great exasperation. Her exploitation is evident both in Maxime's irresponsibility towards the possible outcome of their sexual encounters ('la récolte n'est pas son souci'), and in his careless treatment ('ma terre, il la prend dans ses mains et la jette aux alizés').

Women writers therefore go a step further than their male counterparts by re-appropriating the trope of the island woman to suggest identification between the exploited Caribbean (neo)colony and the Antillean woman oppressed by her male companion. A parallel is thus established between (neo)imperialism and domestic violence. So here the metaphor functions to signal and denounce an ongoing exploitation that, in accordance with the phenomenon of reproduction of oppression characteristic of the colonised people (as analysed by Fanon and examined in chapter four), has ceased to be the white master's prerogative. Thus to Pineau a Guadeloupe ravaged by the hurricane Hugo in 1989 evoked the image of a woman devastated by rape, and this was to become the central metaphor of *L'Espérance-macadam*, as discussed further on.<sup>23</sup> For many of these authors, therefore, as Françoise Lionnet comments in her analysis of Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* and Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *L'Autre qui danse*, 'La souffrance physique des principales figures féminines semble servir de code pour dénoncer une situation équivoque: celle du statut ambigu, héritage du passé colonial, des départements d'outre-mer' (p. 113).<sup>24</sup>

Most of all, women writers of the last decade (and some of their precursors) offer a critique of the socialisation, which, despite the acquisition of legal rights,

<sup>23</sup> As in an unpublished interview granted on 6 January 1998.

<sup>24</sup> This comment could also apply to Alba Ambert's *Porque hay silencio* (San Juan: ediciones Laureles, 1984), where Blanca's suffering derives primarily from the alienation stemming from the colonial status of Puerto Rico. Micheline Rice Maximin reaches similar conclusions in 'Représentations de la Femme dans la Littérature Antillaise Francophone', in *African Continuities/L'héritage africain*, ed. by Simeon Walianlu Chilungu and Sada Nian, Toronto: Terebi, 1989, pp. 223-243.

maintains Caribbean women in a subaltern position that hampers their self-fulfilment. In sexist societies like those of the Caribbean, gender is bound to complicate the struggle for the emergence, both at the individual and collective level, of a multiple identity whose conception is ever-changing, as discussed in the introduction. In the Francophone area, where the great majority is of primarily African or Indian descent and the progress of female emancipation slow, gender remains central to recent women writers' conception of identity. In contemporaneous Hispanic women's writing, on the other hand, especially Puerto Rico and Cuba, the advances made by women's liberation movements have allowed the issue of gender to gradually recede (without completely disappearing), in favour of as yet unresolved issues affecting men and women alike. Several major women writers, notably Ana Lydia Vega, Mayra Santos and the poet Nancy Morejón, are particularly concerned with the issue of colour.<sup>25</sup> *Afro*-Caribbean women have also begun to express their views in greater number in the area: among the most promising fiction writers of the younger generation are the Dominicans Aurora Arias and Emilia Pereyra, and the aforementioned Mayra Santos from Puerto Rico.

These factors explain why Francophone female protagonists remain largely represented as victims, while their Hispanic counterparts, especially from Puerto Rico and to a lesser degree Cuba, are increasingly portrayed as liberated, although their freedom can actually turn out to be limited. In Puerto Rico too, however, emancipation is slower to reach the most deprived sectors of society.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, even in those texts where the situation for women seems grimmest, a progression along generations and the provision of alternative female models add a note of optimism. This constitutes a fundamental difference with women's writing from the previous decades: where rebellious characters were presented as exceptional, as for instance in the case of Cartagena Portalatín's Estefanía and Electra, or Schwarz-Bart's Lougandors, there is now a clear indication that times are changing for Caribbean women. The rest of this chapter first centres on gender-based oppression

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<sup>25</sup> Conrad James persuasively argues in 'Patterns of Resistance in Afro-Cuban Women's Writing' that in 'Arno a mi amo' Nancy Morejón circumvents the revolutionary rhetoric around race by setting her writing in slavery times. In the same way, Marta Rojas another Afro-Cuban, denounces racial discrimination in early twentieth-century Cuba in *El columpio de Rey Spencer* (1993), but carefully avoids references to the post-revolutionary period. See also Robin Moore's 'Nationalizing Blackness', *op. cit.*, p. v.

<sup>26</sup> Blanca in *Porque hay silencio* and Mayra Santos's Aurelia, Marina and Yetsaida encounter the same humiliations and pains as the female characters in the Francophone and some of the Dominican and Cuban texts examined below. The same is true of Alba Nydia Rivera Ramos's fiction.



and female rebellion in 1990s fiction, to then show how women's writing increasingly transcends gender by displaying a concern with oppression of all kinds.

### 'The Mules of the World'<sup>27</sup>

In 1987 Elizabeth Wilson singled out the denunciation of female oppression as characteristic of women's writing in the Francophone area. This holds true for the Hispanic fiction of the same period, notably in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Apart from Puerto Rico, where female emancipation has reached such a degree that fewer and fewer women writers find the need to deal with this topic, this tendency persists in the following decade across the region, as attested by Gisèle Pineau's writing.

Pineau's style and themes are clearly inscribed in the Schwarz-Bartian tradition, and the author readily acknowledges her debt to her predecessor. Her depiction of female protagonists as victims of men in *L'Espérance-macadam*<sup>28</sup> is particularly reminiscent of Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972). For instance, an extract from the last reads:

Avec leur corps de femmes et leurs yeux d'enfants, mes camarades se sentaient toutes prêtes à malmenier l'existence, elles entendaient conduire leur vie à bride abattue, rattraper leurs mères, leurs tantes, leurs marraines. Les mises en garde fusaient, et les sarcasmes se précipitaient allègrement à la noyade. Les ventres ballonnaient et le temps était aux larges jupes froncées. On narguait les ventres plats... (*Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, p. 82).

This passage finds an echo in Pineau's novel, which conveys the same sense of biological fatality inflicted upon Caribbean women:

Des bougresses qui comptaient plus leur marmaille. [...] sitôt laissé l'école, elles devenaient femelles, savantes en vices. [...] Des hommes les prenaient, de la même façon qu'ils avalaient le rhum, [et puis] les jetaient, pleines. Et la ronde des ventres-calebasses commençait. Avec l'espoir au bout de chaque portée. L'espoir que celui-ci [...] resterait épris, enflammé, généreux, au moins le quart d'une éternité (*L'Espérance-macadam*, pp.18-19).

There are, however, major differences between the two texts. Firstly, in the Lougandors Schwarz-Bart depicted women to look up to, while there are clearly no such models in Pineau. Here the female dwellers of the ghetto are divided into three categories: 'la bougresse-vagabonde jurant et buvant avec des hommes qui la

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<sup>27</sup> African-American novelist Zora Neale Hurston thus refers to the oppression and exploitation of the black woman in *Their Eyes Were Watching Gods*, p. 29 (1937, reprinted by Virago Press, London, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Espérance-macadam*, Paris: Stock, 1995.

montaient vitelement-pressés', 'la femme-chiffe [qui avait] le corps démonté par un seul énerguemène' and 'une-deux femmes sauvées [qui] marchaient seules dans la vie, gouvernaient leur ménage sans mâle, et éduquaient la marmaille d'une manière raide. *Elles pouvaient servir de modèles, mais demeurer au bas de leur ombrage décourageait*' (pp. 163-164, emphasis added). Neither Éliette, who remains deaf to the others' suffering, nor Rosette, who seeks an escape into dreams and fairy-tales or with the Rasta community, are exemplary figures. The only exception would be perhaps Angela, who is not fully developed as a character. In Angela Pineau certainly portrays a protagonist who actively rebels against her plight: this constitutes a second significant difference with *Pluie et vent*, where the sense of rebellion is rather passive, based on endurance of adversity.

In Pineau, the women's oppression mainly derives from domestic violence. Virtually all the male characters in *L'Espérance-macadam* are presented as ruthless women-batterers and murderers: 'La nuit se réveillait toujours percée des cris de femmes battues ruant folles au-devant d'esprits mauvais', (p. 161). Not even within the Rasta community are women spared from domestic violence: 'Le jour où elle trouva ladite-sister en train de courir devant les coups de Brother Delroy [...], Rosette comprit que ce paradis-là dont ils avaient soi-disant hérité n'était pas du côté de Savane' (p. 186). Here the author suggests that such oppressive gender relations are so deeply ingrained in the Caribbean mentality that they pervade any attempt to create a new society. She implies the necessity to re-evaluate the nature of gender relationships if social change is to be achieved. The novel is also replete with accounts of women murdered by pathologically jealous companions. Thus the first crime in Ti-Ghetto is committed by the violent *gouverneur* Régis on Hortense, 'la malheureuse aux trois cent soixante-cinq cicatrices' (p. 105), whom he virtually keeps his captive before murdering and butchering her out of pure jealousy. Régis's emblematic profession as *gouverneur* (or canefield overseer), is tellingly indicative of the extent to which domestic violence has become the social norm, admitted even by representatives of the law and order.

There are in the novel more positive male characters, such as Éliette's caring stepfather Joab, or her two late husbands Renélien and Hector. But none of these acquires the significance of Schwarz-Bart's Ambroise. In fact, no matter how loving, Renélien clearly considers that a woman's place is in the kitchen and her role is to feed her man. He also firmly believes that 'La femme est l'œuvre de l'homme'

(p. 146): woman is man's inferior, and the latter's duty is to educate her. Such a conception leaves the woman with little room for self-fulfilment.

In her essay 'Écrire en tant que Noire', Pineau reports that many Guadeloupean women resent her negative portrayal of men, while on the other hand few male readers complain, as if in tacit acquiescence of her treatment of gender issues:

On m'a souvent reproché l'image et le rôle un peu dépréciés des hommes dans mes récits. [...] Je tiens cependant à préciser que la critique vient essentiellement de femmes ou de jeunes filles; les hommes, eux, se reconnaissent. *Femmes toujours prêtes à couvrir la faute du mâle, à pardonner les outrages, à accepter coups et insultes. Femmes prenant l'homme comme un grand enfant, répondant à tous ses caprices, acceptant tous ses abus* (p. 293, emphasis added).

Here Pineau points to women's own share of responsibility in the construction of gender roles and relationships.

Interestingly, very few female characters in the novel work outside of their home. The only ones striving for financial independence are Mademoiselle Mérédith, Éliette and Glawdys. All the others depend on a man or state benefits for survival. Financial autonomy is clearly not the norm in the community: significantly, Éliette stops working as soon as she gets married, while Glawdys is scorned and judged too proud by the neighbourhood. Economic dependency certainly exacerbates the relationships between men and women; in fact, it can be the source of another form of female oppression, this time sexual. Women's capacity to bear children is indeed exploited by irresponsible men as a source of revenue through the appropriation of welfare subsidies: 'des mâles [...] qui dépendaient [*sic*] l'argent des allocations familiales au ventre des femelles, et puis se frappaient la poitrine et se criaient hommes devant Dieu et les femmes' (p. 62).

The most patent form of female sexual abuse, however, is rape. The case of Hermancia, a mentally deficient girl raped every Friday at the abattoir by seven men, is emblematic. Her rapists are all of different races and taken together, they make up the ethnic gamut of the island: thus they symbolise the Guadeloupean man. Although Pineau may not be claiming that Guadeloupean men are essentially rapists, here she is certainly implying that they are essentially abusers. Even more revolting is the incestuous abuse endured by Éliette and Angela. The experience traumatises Éliette for life, in both affective and sexual terms, and eventually drives her mother to madness. In a far worse situation is Angela, who endures years of paternal abuse, until she finally informs the police. In both examples rape is

juxtaposed with the coming of a hurricane, the one in 1928 and Hugo in 1989, the worst two hurricanes to affect Guadeloupe in the century. Hurricanes are recurrent natural disasters, and their association with rapes underlines both the frequency and the violence of the abuse.<sup>29</sup>

As a result of rape, Éliette is sterile. Patrice J. Proulx offers an interesting interpretation of female sterility in writing by African and Caribbean women. He argues in relation to Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* and 'Sidonie' that:

[T]he inability to bear children serves [to represent] a 'silencing' of (re)productive powers. [...] By making sterility a significant element in the silencing of the protagonists – their voices as well as their bodies become muted – Warner-Vieyra explores the implications of societal injunctions for women to reproduce their biological rather than their imaginative selves (p. 700).

Although motherhood often becomes the plight of women in *L'Espérance-macadam*, Pineau does not go as far as implying that motherhood stifles a woman's creative powers: if anything, in the case of Rosette these are stimulated by her relationship with her daughter, since the stories she invents provide Angela with homework material. Nevertheless, in the light of Proulx' comment, Éliette's sterility becomes emblematic of her suffering, and in particular of her sexual oppression. The figure of Glawdys, a secondary character, further underlines the connection between oppression and frustrated motherhood observed by Proulx. The fruit of Hermancia's multiple rape, Glawdys shares an extremely unhappy childhood between an uncaring adoptive mother and the Social Services. She grows into a beautiful, wild, independent, and solitary woman. When she in turn gives birth to a child whom she is unable to support with her meagre resources, Glawdys kills the baby before disappearing. Her infanticide is presented in the text as the logical consequence of both the repeated abuse she has suffered throughout childhood, and the suffering she endures as an adult ostracised by the community because of her fierce determination to remain independent. The wider implications of Glawdys's act are examined further on.

The acute economic crisis affecting Cuba since the beginning of the 1990s has had significant implications for women. Despite the Revolution's endeavour to improve women's position in Cuban society and reform attitudes to gender relations,

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<sup>29</sup> The cyclical structure of the novel is examined in the next chapter in relation to the author's treatment of history.

women are still largely in charge of the household. As such, they are the first to be affected by the shortages of food, detergents and clothes, and by the inability to repair domestic appliances. Added to the breakdown of the transport system, the situation has considerably increased the time they spend daily on domestic chores.<sup>30</sup> The reality of the Special Period is depicted in García Calzada's *Minimal son*, set in the Cuban province of Guantánamo.<sup>31</sup> The men in the household have reduced their wives to the status of domestic slaves: 'todos los días tener que hacer lo mismo, la inmensa cola, la discusión con el que se cuele, yo soy el uno, y luego la travesía por las calles polvorientas, achicharradas por el sol' (p. 77).

Thus the hardships undergone by the older female protagonists are comparable, in relative terms, to those of Pineau's characters. What attenuates their suffering in comparison to their Guadeloupean counterparts is that their oppression more rarely takes the form of physical violence. Luisa and her daughters-in-law Elsa and Emilia are crushed by social conventions and by selfish, unfaithful husbands. The men in the family treat women, including their mistresses, as sexual objects. Elsa's husband Alfonso, involved in the cockfighting business, regards himself as a 'gallo semental', while his father Juan harasses Elsa and spends most of his time peeping on the young neighbours.

García Calzada's female protagonists respond very differently to such treatment. Luisa has drifted into madness. Elsa, on the other hand, has opted for total submission, to her husband, her boss and even her daughter Sandra. Consequently, her life is made up of frustrations – due to her untimely pregnancy, she renounced a promising university career for a non gratifying job – and resignation: 'Perdió, hace ya un tiempo que lo sabe, y por eso actúa en consecuencia, cuenta hasta diez, respira fuerte y vuelve a contar...' (*Minimal son*, p. 22). Elsa seems to resign herself completely to her role of a sacrificing, nurturing mother and caring wife. Ángela reflects on her: 'le dan pena sus manos, siempre prestas para hacer lo que el marido quiere' (p. 186). She seeks comfort in prayers and in the memory of her late grandparents and her parents, exiled in New York. Elsa bears her lot without protesting, and even with some passivity, for over twenty years; but when she finds

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<sup>30</sup> Carollee Bengelsdorf shows in '[Re]Considering Cuban Women in a Time of Troubles' how despite the Revolution women remain largely subordinate to men in Cuban society: at work, at home, regarding sexual codes, etc (in *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Consuelo López-Springfield, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, pp. 229-255).

<sup>31</sup> Ana Luz García Calzada, *Minimal son*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1995.

out that Alfonso has a mistress, she decides to break free from such oppression and to visit her parents in the United States (possibly to stay). Her refusal to accept her husband's infidelity shows that her life is already an improvement, if only marginal, on Luisa's, who instead put up with Juan's numerous infidelities in silence: 'los tiempos de su [Alfonso's] madre, esclava de su padre, se acabaron', Elsa reflects (p. 30). Although Elsa's response is quite personal (she has not seen her parents in ten years), in a Cuban context, of course, going abroad – and particularly to the US – acquires specific political overtones, and Elsa has to face the disapproval of her in-laws and wider society. So she unwittingly defies in two ways: not only does she leave her husband, but she also 'chooses sides' in the US-Cuban dispute.

Yet, despite this final fit of rebelliousness, Elsa remains traditional, and in many ways she complies with the *machista* order, even perpetuating it. For instance, she focuses her hatred on Alfonso's mistress, rather than on her own husband, as if La Tere were solely to blame for Alfonso's marital infidelity. Elsa's failure to challenge sexism is also evident in her relation to her daughter Sandra, whom she would have liked to see grow into a typical girl gifted at embroidery and who plays with other girls. Instead, Sandra has always been a *marimacho*, and grew up around Alfonso and his friends. The text suggests that, even more so than Alfonso, Elsa would find it difficult to accept Sandra's homosexuality.

Emilia's reaction to her own situation provides a stark contrast to Elsa's. Her situation is even worse, since added to an unhappy marriage with Diego she must bear the constraints of her mentally and physically crippled son Alisio, whose care she assumes virtually on her own for twenty years. Yet in many ways Emilia remains freer than Elsa. Unlike her, she rejects the traditional role of the utterly sacrificing mother and wife, to demand instead her right to self-fulfilment: 'todos me decían qué abnegada eres [...] que palabra tan fea, abnegada, eso, verdaderamente, yo estaba negada, no ab' (p. 78). She resents particularly having to bear the burden of her son on her own: 'Diego dice que debo dejar de ser la primera persona del singular, ustedes también deben de tratar, ¿ustedes no? ustedes *no problem*, ustedes *nothing at all...*' (p. 79). Emilia's very attitude, 'sus gestos duros, esa palabra al filo de navaja con que Emilia resolvía las cosas' contrasts with that of Elsa, 'tan pacata, temerosa de ofender o disgustar' (p. 26). Emilia's final decision to run away from her household, leaving her dependent son behind, likewise counterbalances Elsa's, since the latter only goes to New York after she feels she

has fulfilled her duty as a mother, that is, when her daughter herself leaves home. In some way, Emilia's flight amounts to infanticide: significantly, she tells her parents that her son is dead. As if a self-fulfilling wish, her departure indirectly provokes Alisio's death. Informed of the news, Emilia shows no sign of remorse: for her, her son was just a burden that had become too hard to bear. So if she is certainly not as cold-blooded as Pineau's Glawdys, Emilia could still be regarded as an infanticide. Both characters refuse to espouse the role of self-sacrificing mothers imposed upon them by society. García Calzada and Pineau thus debunk the traditional maternal figure and stress that the cult of motherhood, although a real institution in both Latin America and the Caribbean, is actually not devoid of ambiguity: if it earns women respect, it also perpetuates the exploitation of women as mothers.

The younger female protagonists in *Minimal son*, Ángela and Sandra, are much quicker than Emilia and Elsa to take their destiny in hand. Ángela first appears as an exemplary daughter and young woman, as suggested by her very name and underlined by her recurring characterisation as a 'mujer cordero'. She entirely submits to the authority of her father, who has reduced her to the state of domestic slave after her mother's death: 'Ya no tienes tiempo para los sueños. La manteca se achicharra en el sartén. Apúrate o se armará una bronca grande [...] Después la espera una tonga de ropa sucia, la escala del amarillo al siena, la pompa y el desague del jabón' (p. 87). Yet she is not as angelic as she may seem: for months she conceals her affair with a married man, Diego. In fact, in her first appearance at the opening of the novel, she is conscious of wearing a mask: 'Se ajusta el antifaz y suspira, le gusta el roce de esa tela sobre su rostro' (p. 9). She reflects: 'Ella también quiere eso, ir a donde está Diego y hablarle todo, quitarse ese condenado antifaz y llevárselo lejos, pero no tiene la fuerza de los arcángeles, no es una damita, la vida la obligó a poner esa mirada de cordero que ensaya hasta el aburrimiento, hasta que sus ojos le dicen que el otro ya pisó la trampa' (p. 10). Behind her apparent submissiveness lies extraordinary strength, displayed in her determination towards Diego: 'Sí, ella quiere su pedazo de azul, si es necesario estudiará otro idioma, aprenderá a proyectar' (p. 11). Above all, unlike Elsa, Ángela is not willing to conform to the role of the dutiful wife. She comments: 'Elsa, que pudo haber sido Caperucita y no Cenicienta, que debió preferir el rojo, aunque digan que este color es un invento del Diablo; Elsa eligió Cenicienta' (p. 10). Yet as will be shown later, Ángela's emancipation remains limited.

Of all the women portrayed in *Minimal son*, it is certainly Sandra who reaches most personal growth. Ever since childhood she has refused to espouse the conventional models imposed on women, much to Elsa's grief. She grew up with a freedom rarely granted to girls in the Caribbean, watching her father drink, smoke and play domino with his friends. Owing to this upbringing, she acquired determination and self-confidence. Significantly, she is the only female character in the novel destined to become a professional (she studies medicine): even her mother's hopes of becoming an engineer never materialised. Sandra becomes aware of her homosexuality when she falls in love with Raysa. She subsequently faces her parents' disapproval when she breaks up her engagement with Pablo. Yet one limitation to Sandra's emancipation is her silence, her inability to face her parents' reaction regarding her sexuality. So as to enjoy freedom, she moves to Havana. Thus the capital city is envisaged in García Calzada as the space that best guarantees female emancipation.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas women fall victim to men's violence in *L'Espérance-macadam*, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*<sup>33</sup> as in *Minimal son* they appear most of all victims of socialisation. Atie reports how she was trained to be a perfect housewife:

*Haitian men, they insist that their women are virgins and have their ten fingers.*

According to Tante Atie, each finger had a purpose. It was the way she had been taught to prepare herself to be a woman. Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing. It wasn't her fault, she said. Her ten fingers had been named for her even before she was born. Sometimes, she even wished she had six fingers on each hand so she could have two left for herself (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, p. 151, italics in the original).

In many ways Danticat echoes the Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid, who also denounces the strict socialisation of women in her fiction. The traditional Haitian (and by extension Caribbean) woman is confined to her household and left totally in charge of the numerous domestic tasks, which contrasts with the man's few responsibilities. Ironically, both Atie and her sister Martine remain single for all or most of their lives. The text thus stresses the absurdity of this strict training, designed to benefit men who ultimately fail to materialise. Since Atie's mother Ifé is

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<sup>32</sup> The women depicted in the stories of Adelaida Fernández de Juan's *Oh Vida* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1999) are certainly more emancipated than their provincial counterparts. Yet in some stories, they remain partially or totally subject to male authority and relegated to domesticity.

<sup>33</sup> Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, London: Abacus, 1995 (1<sup>st</sup> edition New York: Soho Press, 1994).



widowed at a young age, it is significant that such oppressive female socialisation should persist even in a household composed exclusively of women. This makes all the more disturbing the strict control of female sexuality involved in such socialisation, as discussed further on. Because of an upbringing geared towards marriage, celibacy generates a sense of frustration in Atie, and it hinders her self-fulfilment: 'They train you to find a husband. [...] They poke at your panties in the middle of the night, to see if you are still whole. [...] They make you burn your fingers learning to cook. Then still you have nothing' (pp. 136-137). Hence her wish for an extra two fingers.

Even surrogate mothering does not completely satisfy her aunt Atie, as Sophie senses: 'Maybe she wanted to be a real mother, have a real daughter to wear matching clothes with, hold hands and learn to read with' (p. 7). Atie's attitude towards marriage and childbearing is in stark contrast to that of Pineau's protagonist Éliette. At the age of thirty-five, Éliette is content with her state of celibacy: 'Elle ne cherchait pas d'homme, c'est vérité. Sa vie s'étalait devant elle, sans creux ni bosses, lisse comme le plat d'une main. L'amour, elle s'en gaussait...' (*L'Espérance-macadam*, p. 148). If she marries twice, it is only in the hope of a child. Realising that she cannot conceive, she considers adoption, and eventually takes Angela in. Thus to Éliette, there is more value in childrearing than in childbearing.<sup>34</sup>

As a child Sophie is keenly aware that a dutiful daughter is expected to replicate her mother's gestures and appearance, hence her comment on daughters with clothes matching their mothers'. Atie further believes that as a celibate daughter she is to remain by her mother. The embitterment of the relationship between Atie and her mother Ifé that Sophie witnesses on her return to Haiti shows the perniciousness of such a sense of duty. Thus here it is Atie who is perpetuating her own unhappiness, out of respect for a tradition that even her own mother finds obsolete: 'She cannot stay out of duty. The things one does, one should do out of love' (p. 119). Danticat shows how women can participate in their own socialisation and eventual sense of dissatisfaction. Sophie's stifling upbringing is hardly more propitious for self-fulfilment than Atie's. She summarises her New York adolescence in the three words 'School, home, and prayer' (p. 67), and gradually discovers upon her arrival

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<sup>34</sup> This is quite significant in a Caribbean society, where great value is conferred on the ability to bear children, and, where, consequently, a woman's sterility is viewed with contempt.

in New York that her mother Martine has already planned her future, from her professional to her sentimental life. So in the cases of Atie and Sophie, the relationship with their mothers proves to be extremely harmful. Martine largely emerges from the text as an unnatural mother. Here the conventionally nurturing Caribbean mother is replaced by a mother with a prosthetic bra, who lightens her skin with bleaching creams, wears girdles, and is too frail to have her daughter (already eleven by the time they are re-united) sit in her lap: Martine is thus clearly an artificial mother. Furthermore, with the repeated mentions of the prosthetic bra, the text seems to imply that Martine's care actually smothers Sophie.

Women's suffering figures in the novel in the form of a parable: a woman's only recourse against inexplicable but constant, heavy bleeding is to ask the goddess Erzulie to change her into a butterfly. This tale seems to imply that in Haitian society suffering is viewed as inherent to woman's condition. To be spared from it, women must be willing to relinquish their human form: in other words, death is their only salvation.<sup>35</sup> This allegory contrasts with the direct confrontation of the issue of domestic violence in *L'Espérance-macadam*. Indeed, here there is no clear indication that men are the perpetrators of this woman's suffering. In fact, this tale immediately precedes Sophie's act of self-mutilation designed to put an end to the practice of the 'tests'. Given that this practice is certainly the most extreme form of violence in the novel, and inflicted by a mother on her daughter, here Danticat seems to underline once more the role women play in their own victimisation.

Perhaps this is why of all the works examined here, it is in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* that the sexual oppression of women seems most acute. Here the abuse is not primarily committed through conventional rape – although Martine was raped at sixteen by a *macoute* – but through the social convention controlling female sexuality. The whole novel is structured around the theme of female virginity, which in Haiti reaches the proportions of a cult, as Sophie reflects. Thus Sophie is not allowed to have a boyfriend before she is eighteen. As soon as it becomes clear that she is seeing a man, her mother subjects her to the *tests*, a practice widespread in her

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<sup>35</sup> The occasions on which the woman bleeds are social events, weddings and funerals, which underlines the connection between the woman's suffering and social pressures. If the link between weddings and women's exploitation is clear, the funerals, which mark the term of life, possibly indicate that a woman suffers until death.

family and village, whereby a mother regularly checks her daughter's virginity by introducing her finger up to her hymen.

So here the victimisers are not only men, since it is the Caco women who carry out the *tests*. As Chancy puts it in her analysis of the novel: 'even in a family in which men do not "exist", the threat of sexual violence and subjugation remains a reality too immediate to be ignored' (*Framing Silence*, p. 128). Martine later justifies her actions to Sophie: 'I did it because my mother had done it to me' (p. 170). In so doing women are in fact victims of socialisation. Of course Haitian men are the main beneficiaries of this practice: 'the mother is responsible for her [daughter's] purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me' (p. 156), Ifé explains. Yet mothers also take advantage of the system, trading their daughter's virginity for social advancement: Martine, for instance, hopes to marry her daughter up.

That these tests are actually a form of rape is evidenced in Martine's claim: 'The one good thing about my being raped was that it made the *testing* stop. The testing and the rape. I live both every day' (p. 170). As for Sophie, she explains: 'When my husband is with me now, it gives me such nightmares that I have to bite my tongue to do it again' (p. 156). Such practice is detrimental to the psychological and sexual well-being of both: it results in Sophie's bulimia and in Martine's madness and ultimate suicide. Just as sterility and the loss of speech are the markers of Éliette's sexual oppression and suffering, Sophie's bulimia is symptomatic of the violence that has been inflicted upon her. The Guadeloupean writer Ernest Pépin comments: 'Mal à l'aise dans le discours dominant, lequel est masculin, c'est avec son corps qu'elle parle. [...] Elle grossit, elle maigrit, elle se déforme'.<sup>36</sup> Thus Sophie feels hatred for her own body: 'I hate my body. I am ashamed to show it to anybody, including my husband. Sometimes I feel like I should be off somewhere by myself' (p. 123). The tale (pp. 154-155) of the young bride failing to bleed on her wedding night despite her virginity, and whose husband bleeds to death in order to produce the evidence guaranteeing his honour, emphasises how fatal socialisation around female sexuality can be.

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<sup>36</sup> 'La femme antillaise et son corps', p. 192, *Présence Africaine* 141 (Paris, 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 1987), pp. 181-193.

Although decreasingly so, class continues to play an important role in the degree of female emancipation in the Caribbean. Women at the top and bottom of the social pyramid often enjoy less freedom than their middle-class counterparts. This is especially true in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where social structures remain very rigid and class differences significant, but also of more economically integrated islands such as Puerto Rico, as attested by Rosario Ferré's writing.<sup>37</sup> Upper-class women in Julia Álvarez's Dominican Republic, like their Puerto Rican and Haitian counterparts in Ferré and Dusseck, remain stifled by their society. Their subordination is gradually revealed in 'Antojos', the opening chapter of Álvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.<sup>38</sup> Here the US-raised protagonist Yolanda has decided to return permanently to the island. Throughout the text, modern, middle-class Yolanda is contrasted with her traditional (not to say conservative), aristocratic female relatives. The injustice based on gender in the Dominican elite is patent. Thus Yolanda's female cousins, unlike their brothers, have received no university education, due to the belief among the Dominican elite that too much education spoils a woman's chances of a good marriage.

In this circle, male marital infidelity is acceptable and a source of pride: 'Once a male cousin bragged that this pre-dinner hour should be called Whore Hour. [T]his is the hour during which a Dominican male of a certain class stops in on his mistress on his way home to his wife' (p. 7). By contrast – as in Danticat's Haiti – female sexuality is repressed, as revealed in 'The cousin' and 'The suitor', from the novel *¡Yo!*.<sup>39</sup> In 'The cousin', sixteen year-old Lucinda is sent to the United States lest she should 'go behind the palm trees and ruin her chances of a good marriage' by staying on the island. She comments: 'they should only have worried once I got to the States. Because [...] there was another revolution happening there [...]. It was the sixties' (*¡Yo!*, pp. 38-39). When her parents discover her relationship with a classmate, Lucinda is immediately taken back to the Dominican Republic. This

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<sup>37</sup> In Micheline Dusseck's *Ecos del Caribe* (Barcelona: Femenino Lumen, 1996), upper-class Haitian Poupée is married off for the sake of his considerable fortune to a man whom she considers her inferior in class, education and even colour (she is a mulatto, while he is black). Her sole preoccupation is her appearance, and she has virtually turned into an adornment for her husband: 'la señora, bella como una muñeca de porcelana, adornada de finos encajes, y calzada con unas delicadas zapatillas a juego' (p. 146). This characterisation of the woman as a doll (sometimes under the form of a ballet dancer) is equally central to Rosario Ferré's *Papeles de Pandora*, which suggests similarities in the fates of upper-class women in Haiti and Puerto Rico. While Ferré's protagonists rebel against their condition, however, Poupée does not display such an intention.

<sup>38</sup> *How the García girls lost their accents*, New York: Plume, 1992 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1991).

<sup>39</sup> *¡Yo!*, New York: Plume Books, 1997.

control of female sexuality is pushed to the extreme in 'The suitor', where Yolanda (already married and divorced twice and in her forties) cannot disclose her relationship with her partner to her island relatives. The latter has to pass for a journalist, because, 'down there women don't have lovers out in the open' (p. 187).

Álvarez further examines the social code for Dominican women in another chapter, 'A Regular Revolution'. As a punishment for insubordinate behaviour, fifteen-year old Sofía is sent back to the island so that she can learn the manners that befit her class. When her sisters come to visit her after six months, Sofia (Fifi) has undergone a complete metamorphosis: she has turned into a 'hair and nails cousin', whose major preoccupations are appearance and social status. She is also engaged to a distant cousin Manuel, who turns out to be a 'tyrant': 'Fifi can't wear pants in public. Fifi can't talk to another man. Fifi can't leave the house without his permission. And what's most disturbing is that Fifi [...] is letting this man tell her what she can and cannot do' (p. 120).

Even Yolanda's mother Laura realises how limited her life was in the Dominican Republic. Once in the United States, she is allowed to '[spread] her wings, [take] adult courses, [dream] of a bigger-than-family-size life for herself' (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, p. 116). Thus the island emerges as a prison for women of the elite: 'I don't deny I looked around me once I was trapped here for the rest of my life', Lucinda says on her return to the Dominican Republic (*¡Yo!*, p. 36). Whereas Sofia at first resents leaving the island, Lucinda resents leaving the United States, and she feels that, had she been able to remain there, she would have escaped her fate of 'hair and nails cousin'. As for Yolanda, not surprisingly she is unable to adjust to the limiting role ascribed to women within the Dominican elite, and by the end of 'Antojos' she renounces the idea of settling permanently in the island.

The authors discussed above thus revise the portrayals of women traditionally found in Caribbean writing. Their fiction undermines the image of the resourceful matriarch with a detailed description of the realities of motherhood in the region, sometimes disclosing the weaknesses and powerlessness of Caribbean mothers, as in the cases of Danticat's Martine or Pineau's Rosette. The determination of these two mothers is also shown to be harmful to their daughters. Pineau and García Calzada go as far as featuring infanticide mothers. In both cases, what prompts Glawdys and

Emilia to their act is clearly sheer desperation: they are unable to cope with the responsibility which they have been left to bear entirely on their own. Through these characters, the authors denounce the hypocrisy of the cult of the sacrosanct, self-sacrificing mother, which, by spreading the notion that women ought to be utterly dedicated to their children, allows the fathers to abdicate their duties.

Pineau, García Calzada, Danticat, and Álvarez also challenge their male counterparts' focus on female sensuality. While García Calzada shows in *Sandra* that a desire for women is not the prerogative of men, all these texts are concerned with the harmful consequences, for women, of being held as objects of pleasure. Each of the Francophone novels presents at least one case of rape: several generations of women in a same family are subject to it in *L'Espérance-macadam*, while it affects Martine in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. In this last novel all Caco women are also victims of another form of rape, the horrific practice of the *tests*. In García Calzada's *Minimal son*, Ángela was molested as a child. So, along with social exploitation, most of these female protagonists endure sexual oppression, be it direct sexual abuse or the social control of female sexuality. The authors thus stress that the sexual oppression of Caribbean women did not cease with colonial times, but persists despite social change.

Yet incest as a particular form of rape could also be interpreted as a symptom for the alienation of Antillean men (and women, in Danticat's novel) generated by the (neo)colonial status of the region.<sup>40</sup> The insistence on this motif could thus take on a wider meaning. If in Pineau the parallel between rape and hurricane suggests that the exploitation of women is also that of the island at large, the metaphor of the hurricane to symbolise the incestuous act further seems to imply that, like hurricanes, incest is endemic to these (neo)colonies: 'Le papa tombé sur elle la veille du Cyclone 28, qui s'était abîmé pareil sur la Guadeloupe' (p. 292). The author thus underlines that exploitation (sexual and else) has been constant throughout history: Angela in 1989 finds herself in the same situation as Eliette in 1928. Moreover, the filiation between the two rapists, who turn out to be father and son, suggests that the exploiters have essentially remained the same. Using again the metaphor of the hurricane, Anoncia comments: 'Terrifique, comme son frère de 28. Mais c'est peut-être le même qui revient toujours' (p. 299). It is certainly no

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<sup>40</sup> The reproduction of oppression by the alienated colonised is analysed in chapter four.

coincidence that two of the novels discussed above should feature a protagonist bearing the highly symbolic name of Angela, both sexually abused in childhood. If García Calzada's *Ángela*, as discussed above, is actually not devoid of duplicity, Pineau's protagonist figures as an innocent victim of all injustices.

While the motif of rape abounds in the Francophone novels, the Hispanic texts centre more particularly on marital infidelity, and the form of sexual exploitation that most often recurs is that of prostitution.<sup>41</sup> Financial difficulties and the need to have access to dollars have led many Cuban women in the Special Period to associate themselves with tourists or privileged Cubans. A characteristic of this new form of prostitution, called *jinetería*, is that it affects professionals as well as people from the lower echelons of society. Several women writers express their concern with this situation in their fiction.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in these texts as in the male writers examined previously, the exploited woman evokes the exploitation of the Caribbean and its people. Thus in Danticat, Martine's sexual oppressor is a *macoute*, whose militia exploit and tyrannise the whole population. In *L'Espérance-macadam*, besides the interpretation of the motif of incest given above, the status of the island is explicitly denounced when Rosette reflects: 'Non, rien n'avait changé depuis qu'on avait transbordé les premiers Nègres d'Afrique dans ce pays qui ne savait qu'enfanter des cyclones, cette terre violente où tant de malédiction pesait sur les hommes et femmes de toutes nations' (p. 241). The infanticide Glawdys likewise comes to represent all the Caribbean women oppressed since slavery: 'Glawdys [...] avait fait comme ces Nègresses des premiers voyages qui tuaient leurs nouveau-nés pour pas qu'ils naissent dans l'esclavage, tombent pas dans les pattes des négriers' (p. 243). This comparison is

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<sup>41</sup> The motif of incest, however, is also found in the fiction of Mayra Santos ('Marina y su olor' from *Pez de vidrio*, *op. cit.*, and 'Resinas para Aurelia' from *El cuerpo correcto*, *op. cit.*, and in Anna Lidia Vega Serova's 'Performance de Navidad' in *Bad Painting*, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Thus Daína Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1998) recounts the story of an art expert who turns to *jinetería* in order to support her son. In 'Para eso son las amigas' (*Desnudo de mujer*, Santa Clara, Cuba: Sed de Belleza editores, 1998), Rebeca Murga Vicens likewise shows how her protagonist gradually comes to accept *jinetería* as a way of life. The figure of the *jinetera* also appears in Zoé Valdés's *La nada cotidiana* (Barcelona: Emecé editores, 1996, 1<sup>st</sup> edition Letras Cubanas, Havana, 1994). An oblique allusion to the phenomenon is made in Fernández de Juan's 'Viaje a Pepe' (*¡Oh Vida!*), where the female protagonist, a doctor, hopes to reduce her taxi fare by showing her legs to the driver. Tomás Fernández Robaina explores the phenomenon of *jinetería* in *Mujeres públicas*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1998. This concern with widespread prostitution linked to tourism is echoed in the Dominican Republic, notably in Carmen Imbert Brugal's novel *Distinguida señora* (Santo Domingo: Amigo del Hogar, 1995) and her sociological writing, as well as in Martha Rivera's novel *He olvidado tu nombre* (Santo Domingo: Casa de Teatro, 1997).

all the more pertinent because in childhood Glawdys' freedom was restricted: she was kept tied to a rope all day long, which draws an obvious parallel with slavery. So the grown-up Glawdys' unconditional desire for freedom is comparable to that of the maroons. As for the recurring theme of *jinetería* or prostitution in the Hispanic texts, it could signify the sale of the island at large to great powers and the global economy.

### **From victims to rebels to 'liberated' women**

Depicting women as eternal victims can prove ultimately paralysing. Alongside the detailed picture of the plight of women (especially grim in the Francophone area) all of the authors examined here therefore offer alternative images of women: rebels. There is in their fiction a noticeable progression along generational lines: rebellion usually takes place among the younger protagonists, as if to incite Caribbean women to realise that their long-time resilience has come to an end.

A few members of the former generations already display some resistance in *L'Espérance-macadam*. Thus Mademoiselle Mérédith opts for celibacy in order to retain her freedom, while Éliette always maintains a degree of emotional independence from her husbands. As for Rosette, her rebellion begins when as a teenager she elopes with Rosan. Later on, like Toussine and then Télumée in *Pluie et vent*, she distances herself from the rest of the community. Rosette's refusal to accept abusive treatment as the price to pay for male companionship demarcates her from the other women in the neighbourhood, while her fascination with the marginal Rasta community further attests to her defiance of social norms and public opinion. Bob Marley's songs and Rastafarianism give her a sense of liberation. But as soon as she realises that the Rasta community remains oppressive to women, Rosette loses interest in it.

Angela's dissent is greater, since rather than simply fleeing the parental home, like her mother Rosette before her, she protects her younger sister by turning in her father Rosan to the police. Rosette cannot forgive her daughter for what she regards as her betrayal. Angela in turn rebels against her mother, who in some way could be considered as Rosan's blind accomplice, by leaving home and refusing to return. Angela's rebellion is thus complete. Yet it is Glawdys who comes to incarnate rebellion in the novel. Everything about Glawdys is defiant: her beauty, her pride,



her independence, and the little consideration she holds for social norms and public opinion. With her last and most extreme act of rebellion, infanticide, Glawdys reaches absolute freedom. She has no family. Like a solitary nomad, she is tied to no particular place or community. Most of all, she manages to achieve what most women in the neighbourhood cannot: financial and emotional independence. No man exploits or abuses her, and by killing her child she ruthlessly eliminates her sole commitment. Nevertheless, Glawdys's way to liberation hardly stands as an example to be emulated.

The same growing awareness from one generation to the next can be observed in *Minimal son*. Unlike Luisa, whose lifelong oppression drove her to madness, Emilia and Elsa rebel in middle age. The female protagonists of the next generation are much quicker in reaching emancipation and self-fulfilment. Yet Ángela's liberation remains limited, for the freedom she envisages relies entirely on an equally authoritative man, Emilia's husband Diego, who clearly never intends to break up his marriage. After Emilia's departure, Diego's attitude shows little promise of a possible regularisation of his relationship with Ángela either. Nevertheless, Ángela is determined enough to defy social conventions by exposing her relationship with a man twice her age, and this despite her father's pressure for them to officialise their commitment. Elsa's daughter Sandra is certainly the most liberated female protagonist in the novel. Although she dares neither to assume openly her sexuality in her hometown, nor to face her family's reaction (she conceals her reasons for breaking up with Pablo), on a personal level Sandra fully comes to terms with it. She would rather sacrifice the company of her parents, to whom she is extremely close, than let their disappointment become an obstacle to her self-fulfilment: 'Ahora deberá luchar muy fuerte para sacudirse la carga' (p. 59). She therefore opts for a self-imposed, internal exile.

*Breath, Eyes, Memory* offers two images of rebels, Atie and Sophie. Atie's insubordination begins in adolescence, and is manifested chiefly in her conflictive relationship with her mother. The Atie Sophie finds on her return to Haiti is in many respects a liberated woman. Her friendship with Louise, who taught her how to read, and her writing both defy social conventions.<sup>43</sup> Yet her conviction that it is her duty

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<sup>43</sup> In *Framing Silence*, Chancy reads Atie's friendship with Louise as a platonic lesbian relationship, arguing that Atie has reached full liberation and self-realisation. Yet arguably Atie's rebellion is incomplete, for she remains bound by social constraints, especially in relation to her

to take care of her mother, despite the considerable restrictions on her personal growth this requires, shows the limitations of her rebelliousness. Sophie's liberation is more complete. It starts with an act of self-mutilation: she rips open her hymen with a pestle in order to stop her mother from 'testing' her. Ambiguous as this act may seem, for Sophie it is unequivocally 'like breaking manacles, an act of freedom' (p. 130). On the same day she elopes with Joseph. She subsequently marries him and becomes a secretary. So Sophie rebels by leading a life that contradicts in every respect what her mother had planned for her. Martine disapproved of Joseph, an Afro-American saxophone player twice Sophie's age, and hoped to match her with an upper-class Haitian exile, hence the importance of keeping her 'pure'. She also wanted her to study medicine. Instead, Sophie fulfils her childhood aspirations by becoming a secretary.

In Álvarez's novels, Lucinda is the only female protagonist to have been brought up entirely on the island, but for her brief stay in the US. While as an adolescent she is rebellious, as an adult she seems to have complied with the constraints exerted on her. Only Fifi and Yo, therefore, manage to find self-fulfilment, and this takes place outside the island.

Of the texts examined here, it is certainly in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *Minimal son* that the rebellion is most significant. What Sophie challenges is a family tradition passed on from mother to daughter, which she is determined to uproot: 'I was not angry with her [her mother] anymore. I had a greater need to understand, so that I would never repeat it myself' (p. 170). Thus, like Erzulie, Sophie breaks the cycle of oppression. And so does Pineau's Angela, who prevents her father from laying a hand on her younger sister. Emilia, Elsa and Sandra's desertion of the household is likewise highly significant. Emilia's abandoning of her son amounts to a rejection of the traditional role of the Cuban mother. As for Elsa and Sandra, by respectively leaving for the US and acknowledging homosexuality, they both expose themselves in a society that for a while condemned those who joined the US as traitors and homosexuals as social misfits, both groups being judged inapt to build a new Cuba. On the personal level, the fact that neither Sandra nor Alisio will bear children also means that the patterns of oppression will not carry on to the next generation. So the text seems to imply that the times of oppression have come to an

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mother, her most direct victimiser. As will be discussed later, the real rebel in the novel is Sophie, on whose story, curiously enough, Chancy does not comment.

end with the extinction of the lineage. Thus in breaking the vicious circle, the protagonists of three of these novels not only make changes to their individual lives, but, the texts suggest, their acts of rebellion also have an impact on the lives of the other women around them. In this respect, they confirm O'Callaghan's claim that Caribbean women's writing is 'committed to an ideology of change'.

Yet in the case of Álvarez's Lucinda and Yo, emancipation is closely connected to exile. And it is indeed significant that, in all these novels, liberation is only possible after the protagonists sever themselves from their communities. Exile thus seems to be a necessary condition to their self-fulfilment, a point that will be developed in the final chapter. If García Calzada's Emilia and Pineau's Angela need to run away from home to put an end to their hardship (and for neither is the disappearance of the source of suffering a sufficient condition to return home), García Calzada's Sandra and Danticat's Sophie have to leave the home city. As for Álvarez's Yo and Lucinda, Danticat's Martine, and García Calzada's Elsa, they only find salvation by leaving the homeland.<sup>44</sup>

In a sense, the generational liberation observed on the fictional level only replicates the progression from *combatidas* to *combatientes* observed by Cartagena Portalatín in connection with the authors. The *combatientes* have ceased to focus exclusively on victims or even on rebellious figures, and depict women as increasingly liberated. Yet despite precursors such as Manicom's Madévie in *Mon examen de blanc* and her midwife in *La Graine*, or Warner-Vieyra's Hélène in *Juletane*, and with the exception of Condé's female protagonists, there are few such images in Francophone women's writing of the last decade. This phenomenon is much more noticeable in the Hispanic Antilles, where writers born around the mid-1960s and after rarely describe female protagonists enduring such extreme conditions as those portrayed in Danticat, Dusseck, García Calzada, and Pineau. This is clear in the fiction of Mayra Santos (Puerto Rico, 1966), Aurora Arias (Dominican Republic, 1962) and Anna Lidia Vega Serova (Cuba, 1968). These authors portray many modern women who have acquired financial independence,

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<sup>44</sup> As examined in the final chapter, going home is for Sophie and Yo a necessary step towards recovery, but the journey does not end there. Both have to create for themselves a new space where they can reach self-fulfilment.

are liberated from the male yoke and in control of their own sexuality.<sup>45</sup> Yet, liberated as they may be, these women rarely achieve self-fulfilment, because they remain affected by the constraints of society.

In fact, although female protagonists remain prevalent, the work of many younger women writers no longer centres exclusively on gender issues; rather, it tends towards androgyny, a notion discussed further on. Indeed, Dayan comments, in a 'male- and money-dominated Caribbean' women poets from the Anglophone area 'join their voices with the disenfranchised in urban ghetto or the countryside, as well as with the "high-brown" woman locked in her great house' (p. 57). This would certainly apply to women's writing across genres and languages, but is particularly true of the Hispanic region, where most of the fiction produced over the past two or three decades is set in urban areas, and where the city acquires such dimensions that it almost becomes a character in its own right. As will be shown in connection to Santos, this particular writing displays a concern with all forms of marginalisation, and no longer solely those affecting women specifically.<sup>46</sup>

Mayra Santos' collections *Pez de vidrio* and *El cuerpo correcto* are inhabited by people who have been judged immoral or harmful by society, such as prisoners, or who remain largely condemned by public opinion in Puerto Rico, for instance homosexuals. Other marginal characters on which these stories focus are the blacks from the lower social echelons.<sup>47</sup> Many of Santos's protagonists are black, but colour is only really an issue in 'Hebra rota', 'Marina y su olor' and 'Resinas para Aurelia'. These three stories feature black women who are socially marginalised:

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<sup>45</sup> As it does worldwide, the emphasis on the erotic stands for Caribbean women writers as a liberating act: their response to their male counterparts' commodification of the female body. Illustrations of this tendency are Mayra Montero's *La última noche que pasé contigo* (Puerto Rico, 1986), as well as the fiction of numerous Cuban *novísimas* and *postnovísimas* such as Chely Lima (*Brujas*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1990), and Lucy Araújo (the section 'La señorita cerro' of her collection *Itanám*, Las Tunas, Cuba: Editorial Sanlope, 1995), Ena Lucía Portela ('Hay un loco en el baño', from *Una extraña entre las piedras*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, Cemí, 1999), Elvira Rodríguez Puerto and Aymara Aymerich (*Deseos líquidos*, Havana: Editorial Abril, 1999), and Anna Lidia Vega Serova (*Catálogo de Mascotas*, Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1999). The collections by Mayra Santos (*El cuerpo correcto*, 1998), or the Cubans Sonia Rivera (*Las historias prohibidas de Marta Veneranda*, Havana: Letras Cubanas/ Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 1997) and Rebeca Murga Vicens (*Desnudo de mujer*, *op. cit.*), which except for the last no longer focus on women, celebrate sexuality under all forms, whether conventional and socially acceptable or not. In the Francophone area, Condé is one of the few to openly describe female desire in her fiction.

<sup>46</sup> Many of the observations that will be made in connection with Santos could also apply to Aurora Arias (*Invi's Paradise*, Montreal: CCLEH, 1998), Anna Lidia Vega Serova (*Bad Painting*) and the Haitian Yanick Lahens (*Tante Résia et les dieux*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Mayra Santos's most recent novel, *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (Spain: Mondadori, 2000) cumulates all these forms of marginalisation. It relates the life of a black teenager who is rescued from the street and the world of drugs to make a career as a transvestite singer.

deprivation and alienation for Yetsaida in 'Hebra rota', economic and sexual exploitation for the young Marina who works as a cook for the Velazquez, and prostitution for Aurelia. In all three cases, violence, whether actual or imminent, is part of the characters' lives. It is the threat of her husband's incestuous desire that moves Marina's mother to place her as an in-house servant at the age of thirteen. Aurelia has likewise fled home and the sexual abuse of an authoritarian father. As for the violence to which Yetsaida is subject, it is both domestic and psychological and will be discussed in chapter four.

Apart from these three characters, who, at least initially, endure comparable hardship to that examined above, the female protagonists in the other stories have succeeded in emancipating themselves. The oppression to which they remain subject is rarely gender specific, but largely results from the dehumanisation of modern life and the city. Thus the San Juan depicted by Santos is dominated by a violence affecting men and women alike. The story 'Dulce pesadilla, Abnel' opens with a scene which is comical, but not devoid of aggressiveness, as people fight to get a seat on the bus at rush hour: 'se preparó para el simulacro de guerra venidero: meterse en la guagua a como diera lugar para luego pelearse hasta la muerte por el último de los asientos disponibles. Ella era una experta en eso' (p. 27). There is also an allusion to the rampant criminality of San Juan: 'colocó su cartera en la falda, aguantándola con ambas manos, por si acaso' (p. 27). Violence is implicit in three of the stories, set in prison: 'Dilcia M.', 'Auto de Fe' and 'Oso Blanco', a story from *El cuerpo correcto*. Dilcia M., for instance, is a pro-independence activist who was involved in armed struggle, while the inmate of 'Oso Blanco' was a child molester. As discussed later on, this violence is in fact reciprocal, since, as 'Oso Blanco' shows, society and the judicial system in turn perpetrate violence against prisoners.

Like its inhabitants, the city itself is presented as aggressive in Mayra Santos: it is the place of materialism, unbridled consumerism, technology and the crowd. But the main characteristic of Santos's San Juan is solitude. Among the multitude, Santos's protagonists are lonely: 'La calle se despierta y deja a todos como zombies. Cada uno se queda en su calle de sueños y accidentes', the narrator observes in 'Oráculos urbanos' (*Pez de vidrio*, p. 36). In fact, loneliness affects most of the protagonists of the first section of the earlier collection (all women), as well as the protagonists of 'Oso Blanco'. Thus 'Nightstand' opens with the protagonist on her own in a nightclub. Her initial boredom and loneliness are evident: 'Ya se sienta. Ya

cruza y descruza sus piernas; ya se cansa de mirar a las parejas retorcerse en la pista de baile. Casi se decide a irse cuando se le acerca una mano...' (*Pez de vidrio*, p. 14). 'Pez de vidrio' equally begins with the protagonist, Juliana, on her own in an overcrowded, trendy gay bar in San Juan. Despite her initial claim that she only came to the bar out of sheer curiosity, the story reveals Juliana's coming to awareness of her own homosexuality. In the bar she sees one of her colleagues, and realises her attraction to her. She first denies her homosexual desire by ascribing it to her extreme loneliness: 'Juliana sufrió aquella noche y el día y la noche siguientes, intentando convencerse de que todo aquello era normal, de que debía ser su soledad la culpable del desvío' (p. 21). And further: 'Juliana no pudo evitar pensar en ella. Pensó que tal vez intuía la dimensión correcta de su angustia, de su fiereza trunca, de su silenciosa soledad' (p. 22). Yet, like García Calzada's Sandra, Juliana decides to assume her homosexuality, and in the final sentence of the story she asks her colleague out for lunch.

In 'Dulce pesadilla, Abnel', the daily peeping sessions onto her neighbour are likewise the protagonist's sole distraction in her lonely, monotonous life:

Carmen y Caco, Romeo y Julieta, ella y Abnel forever: para siempre. [T]odos los días de la semana a las 6:15 en punto se acercaba a la ventana de su apartamento de solterona y detrás de la cortina liviana se ponía a mirar hacia el edificio de enfrente a verlo salir del baño, húmedo, buscar sus pantalones y camisas en el closet, vestirse lentamente y salir a quiénsabequé (p. 28).

Here the sarcastic tone underlines the isolation of the protagonist: instead of alluding to a relationship between the two characters, the expression 'ella y Abnel forever' refers to her voyeurism. In reality, up until the turning point of the story, there is absolutely no communication between the two. Abnel plays for the protagonist the therapeutic role of the soap opera: 'No se podía perderse a Abnel aquella tarde. Él la sacaba, aunque fuera de mentira, de su aburrimiento' (p. 29).

In addition to the three prisoners, several protagonists thus find themselves literally trapped, alone among the crowd of buses at rush hour, nightclubs, or bars. The whole city, then, figures as a prison. In stories such as 'Dulce pesadilla, Abnel' or 'Oso blanco', Santos uses the metaphor of the traffic jam, developed by authors like Julio Cortázar in his story 'L'autoroute du Sud', or Luis Rafael Sánchez in *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, to symbolise the dead end of modern life. The theme of solitude reaches its climax in 'Oso Blanco'. The story begins:

‘Levantarse, ir al baño, lavar cara, boca, desayunar, peinarse, vestirse corriendo, salir salir salir, prender, llave, donde carajo las... prender el carro, marquesina, sacarlo de la marquesina, cerrar portón, llegar tarde, siempre llegar tarde, llegar tarde por el maldito tapón’ (*El cuerpo correcto*, p. 25).

The enumeration of actions conveys the boredom of daily routine. It also points to the protagonist’s loneliness: she seems to be saying these words out loud, talking to herself, as people often do when they are on their own. As for the protagonist’s job, it is described with ellipses ‘trabajo... trabajo... más trabajo’ (p. 26), suggestive of how exciting it is.

In this story the traffic jam (‘tapón’) and the prison become primary elements of the narrative: both the female protagonist trapped in daily routine and the prisoner are equally lonely, until the point when they, or rather their arms endowed with a life of their own, establish contact. An erotic relationship emerges between the two characters via their arms:

Esperar, esperar en el tapón, la celda se despierta, sale el brazo, que salga el brazo y reconozca el carro verdemonte, viejo y destartado, que reconozca el carro verdemonte destartado, que reconozca el carro verdemonte destartado y sonría, ella nunca había visto un brazo sonreír, pero ahora, ya sale el brazo entero y sonríe y la saluda como cada mañana (p. 29).

Meanwhile the prisoner reveals his loneliness: ‘Así fue como fui desarrollando mi teoría del síndrome de autoconciencia independiente, la cual soñaba compartir con alguien, allá afuera’ (p. 42). Here as in ‘Dulce pesadilla, Abnel’, the characters are so isolated that they cannot establish a normal relationship with others: the communication is either flawed (voyeuristic) or partial (involving only the arms of the protagonists).

Through loneliness and excessive technology, the city ends up swallowing the people. In the third part of ‘Oso Blanco’, Santos uses the metaphor of the bear who eats the inmates to refer to the prison, and, by extension, the judiciary system (‘Oso Blanco’ is the nickname given to one of the main prisons of San Juan). This final part, narrated by Oso Blanco itself, begins with the following words: ‘Yo soy el oso mañoso que como cuerpos de presidio’ (p. 49). This metaphor is extended both to the city and modern life, since the female protagonist is also eaten up by daily routine, and to the whole society, whose responsibility in the rising phenomenon of crime is also brought into question. The story concludes with an address, in which

Santos invites the reader to take responsibility for the inefficacy and injustice of the penal system:

Por suerte soy poderoso y voraz. Por suerte soy un oso con suerte. Hice un truco malvado y me reí ¡JA, JAAAA...! en medio del expreso. [...] Virgen santa - dirán ustedes, pero qué oso farfullero y cobarde, qué oso monstruoso y voraz. Como si no lo fueran ustedes gozando de mi espectáculo, comiéndose mis palabras, imaginándose presos que son perritos y brazos trapeceistas y sudor. Como si no se escondieran ustedes detrás de sus grandes espejuelos a intentar devorarme. Admítanlo, ustedes son como yo. Ustedes son como yo [...] Yo soy un oso muy mañoso y defiendo muy bien mis alimentos (pp. 55-56).

Yet loneliness affects women in a particular way. Santos seems to suggest that for her protagonists as for many liberated women in today's Puerto Rico, loneliness is the price to pay for a newly found freedom. The society they live in remains limiting: for instance, few can find companions open-minded enough to match them. For these women, then, emancipation has a bitter taste. Despite the violence, loneliness and dehumanisation it produces, Santos's city nonetheless offers a more positive note: the anonymity resulting from the multitude also offers more room for marginality, as in the case of Juliana in 'Pez de vidrio'.<sup>48</sup>

### **Androgyny: towards a resolution of gender conflicts?**

Ramón Luis Acevedo remarks in *Del silencio al estallido* how the fiction of Mayra Montero in the mid-1980s already displays an intention to transcend feminist concerns. More women's writing has followed the same direction over the 1990s: some of the fiction by Ana Lydia Vega or Aida Bahr, later emulated by writers such as Mayra Santos discussed here, as well as Aurora Arias, Yanick Lahens, and Anna Lidia Vega Serova, are among the best examples of this phenomenon, which could be termed 'androgyny'. Vega has thus moved beyond the feminist agenda of *Virgenes y mártires* (although it does not disappear completely, as attested by 'Premio de consolación', a story dealing with marital infidelity and a woman's revenge from *Falsas crónicas del sur*, 1991) to a concern for the underdogs of the Caribbean in *Encancaranublado*. This evolution is even more noticeable in authors

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<sup>48</sup> In 'Lupe' Arias also develops this theme of the loneliness of liberated women. The protagonist – here again a left-wing intellectual and professional ironically described as a 'mujer emancipada de fines de milenio que habita en un país del Tercer Mundo en vías de desarrollo' (p. 95) – is involved with Dagoberto, a married lorry driver and father of two supported by his wife in New York, and who simply regards her as a sex object. Ina Césaire also tells Makward that she regards loneliness as the major problem faced today by French Caribbean women (*L'héritage de Caliban*, p. 141).



born after 1960. Thus, as discussed above, the oppression depicted in Santos is rarely gender specific. Similarly, except in 'Lupe', women's issues occupy the backstage of Arias's *Invi's Paradise*, and the main focus is on urban contemporary life. In most stories the gender of the protagonists seems accidental, or has little incidence on their psychological development or the course of action. The same could be said of Lahens's *Tante Résia et les dieux*. Several of these writers have now become the spokespersons for the economically or socially marginal, above all the proletariat, homosexuals, and blacks. In this respect, their writing shares many affinities with the homosexual writing produced in the region. The alliance of the woman writer with the marginal and underclass noted by Dayan is most visible in Vega Serova's *Bad Painting*. Several of the stories (all centred on women except for the last) focus on young protagonists who find in drugs an escape from a stifling upbringing or from sordid surroundings. All remain alienated in a world of decay, the absurd, loneliness, drugs, AIDS, incest, madness, and suicide. Yet, here again, their alienation is not gender specific.<sup>49</sup>

Androgynous writing is a clear indicator that gender inequalities are diminishing in Caribbean societies. Yet it tends to be circumscribed to fiction dealing with urban, middle-class characters. Significantly, it is also less frequent in the Francophone than in the Hispanic area. Nevertheless, a parallel, if slower, evolution is noticeable in recent Francophone writing too, as attested by the noticeable change in tone of male authors such as Ernest Pépin and Patrick Chamoiseau, who seem to have revised their androcentric position in favour of a discourse that is more receptive to the representation of women as full subjects. For instance, Pépin's *L'Homme au bâton*, a novel revolving around the myth of male hypervirility, has thus been succeeded by his *Le Tango de la haine*, which attempts to devote equal space to the voices of the male and female protagonists; similarly Chamoiseau's *Texaco* contrasts with his previous *Chronique des sept misères* and *Solibo Magnifique* in its emphasis on female voices. Yet, as will be seen in the next chapter, the voice of Chamoiseau's third novel remains male-dominated.<sup>50</sup> The Guadeloupean novelist

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<sup>49</sup> In 'Triple escorzo', for instance, the repeated phrases 'lo de siempre' and 'los de siempre' convey the young characters' despair and little hope of economic or political change, their sentiment of leading 'una vida prestada' characterised by immutability, over which they have no control. Each is doomed to a tragic end: death by overdose for el Lobo, madness for Lana, suicide for el Gitano.

<sup>50</sup> *L'Homme au bâton* (1992), *Le Tango de la haine* (1999), *Chronique des sept misères* (1986), *Solibo Magnifique* (1988), and *Texaco* (1992), all five published by Gallimard, Paris.

Daniel Maximin has in this respect stood out in the Francophone tradition. From his first novel *L'Isolé soleil*,<sup>51</sup> he indicated a concern for the exclusion of women in Caribbean literature and theoretical discourses. Maximin's position as exile is perhaps what enabled him to distance himself at an early stage from the overt masculinism of the dominant French Caribbean discourse. This is indeed what his compatriot Max Jeanne's *La Chasse au racoon*, published only a year before Maximin's first novel, suggests: here women remain secondary.<sup>52</sup> Besides such exceptional cases as Maximin, it seems that in the Hispanic and Francophone areas it is women writers' response to a male-dominated literary tradition that is now forcing male writers to re-adjust their views on gender. Because of its long tradition of marginalisation, women's writing, even when it ceases to focus on women's issues, is likely to retain the critical stance and denunciation of social inequalities and oppression of all forms that largely contribute to its specificity.

The writers analysed here have been thoroughly revising the images of women prevailing in their male counterparts. Fleeting portraits of women as lovers and mothers are contrasted with vivid female characters who challenge both roles. The next chapter examines how many female authors of the 1990s also question the representation of women as passive or treacherous, and thereby unfit for the elaboration of a new Caribbean nation. Contesting the denial of women's involvement in history-making and nation-building, these authors undermine conventional historiography by substituting for it their own accounts of the past.

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<sup>51</sup> *L'Isolé soleil*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1981.

<sup>52</sup> Max Jeanne, *La Chasse au racoon*, Paris: Karthala, 1980. The same applies to Jeanne's second novel, *Jivaros* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), where the only prominent female character, Sonia, remains a symbol. She is invariably described as a 'femme-phare', a 'femme-sourire', and has little impact on the plot, although her role for the narrative structure of the novel is fundamental, since she is the beneficiary of the main protagonist's diary.

## 2

## **En-gendering the Past: Women Writers and History**

The near invisibility of Caribbean women in literature until so recently merely parallels their obliteration from historiography, all the more so in that local writers and chroniclers alike have long exploited the interplay between history and fiction. Writers across the region have felt the need to redress the version of the past offered by Eurocentric historiographies that long remained the only written accounts available – accounts that effectively dispossessed the Caribbean people of their past by focusing on selected historical events all attributed to metropolitan initiatives. Yet most of these writers have failed to re-appraise the female presence in the Caribbean past. Worse still, many have formulated a nationalist discourse in such terms that it systematically excludes women from history-making and the nation-building process, including their contribution to the elaboration of Caribbean cultures. After a brief discussion of various canonical writers' treatment of history and discourses on nation-building, this chapter will examine the accounts of the past and the conception of history in the fiction of Gisèle Pineau, Mayra Santos, Edwidge Danticat and Julia Álvarez.

### **Re-imagining the past: Caribbean writers and history**

'There is a sense in which, even when they are concerned with contemporary reality, nearly all West Indian novels are engaged with history', notes the

Trinidadian Kenneth Ramchand.<sup>1</sup> Ramchand attributes this obsession with history to the nature of Caribbean society, and in particular to the various ways in which it 'still carries its legacies of slavery and colonialism' (p. 103). The comment, made in relation to the Commonwealth territories, applies to the whole region: the Guadeloupean Max Jeanne cites the examples of Césaire, Glissant, Lacrosil, Orville, as well as Carpentier, Brathwaite and the Trinidadian historian Eric Williams to attest to the fact that this preoccupation with history is common to postcolonial writers across the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> The appropriation of the character Caliban, from *The Tempest*, soon became a point of departure from which to confront history for many Caribbean authors. Their re-writing of the Shakespearean play is characteristic of the oppositionality at work in the elaboration of postcolonial Caribbean literary canons signalled by Belinda Edmondson ('The Canon, The West Indian Writer, and the Novel', p. 2). It illustrates the intent of Caribbean writers and intellectuals to challenge prevailing perceptions on the region by offering new perspectives on it.

Yet due to its 'intimate relationship with the English literary canon', Edmondson argues, the recuperation of the trope of Caliban bespeaks 'specifically gendered terms of identity and dissent' (p. 85). Indeed, she adds, 'It is George Lamming, more so than any Anglophone Caribbean writer, who is responsible for establishing *The Tempest* as the primary text for discourse on the West Indies' relation to Europe, and for erecting Caliban as the symbol of Caribbean manhood and independence' (p. 86). Lamming first used the play for postcolonial ends in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). Writers across the region, notably Césaire, Fernández Retamar, Brathwaite, and Lamming again in his novel *Water with Berries* (1971) produced their own palimpsests of *The Tempest*, across genres.<sup>3</sup> Most of these adaptations, however, embedded new versions of history that, particularly in the essay tradition, reiterate and perpetuate a discursive convention whereby nationalism is virtually equated with manhood. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming thus talks about the 'virile nationalist spirit' of Jamaica (p. 40), and the 'colonial castration of the West Indian sensibility' (p. 49). This gender bias, Edmondson comments, was repeated among postcolonial critics worldwide: 'while the relationship between Prospero and

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<sup>1</sup> In 'The history and the novel: a literary critic's approach', *Savacou* 5 (June 1971), pp. 103-113.

<sup>2</sup> Max Jeanne, 'French West Indian Literature', p. 136, *Présence Africaine* 121-122 (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> trimesters 1982), pp. 135-139.

<sup>3</sup> See Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*', *Critical Inquiry* 13 (Spring 1987, University of Chicago), pp. 557-578, and V. Kutzinski, 'The Cult of Caliban', *op. cit.*

Caliban has received overwhelming critical attention by Third World critics, the relationship between Miranda and Caliban has been virtually ignored' (p. 103). The very reduced number of female characters in Shakespeare's play (Prospero's daughter Miranda and Caliban's absent mother Sycorax) alone cannot account for such an omission. Rather, this further evidences the phallocentrism of many Caribbean (and other postcolonial) discourses.

Probably because of this strong correlation between nationalism and manhood, relatively few women writers have re-appropriated the trope of Caliban in the region.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless Edmondson notes that Jamaican Michelle Cliff and Barbadian Paule Marshall have 'rearranged [the trope] to fit a feminist perspective' (p. 85). On the theoretical level, the Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter elaborates on *The Tempest* to argue that for Caribbean women the identification is not with Miranda, but with Caliban's woman, absent in the Shakespearean text. Nevertheless, Kathleen Balutansky remarks, the model put forward by Wynter still constructs the Caribbean woman as an object of male desire, rather than a subject in her own right: 'attractive as is the notion of calling "Caliban's woman" into existence in order to perceive the (Caribbean) world from her "demonic ground", Wynter's new theoretical model nonetheless creates a trope in which the Caribbean woman is still to be inscribed as Caliban's 'object of desire', functioning as his reproductive mate' (p. 543).<sup>5</sup> The variations on the trope of Caliban, however, are not the only Caribbean discourses on history to be overtly masculinist and to marginalise women's participation in nation-building. A brief examination of three major writers from the Hispanic, Anglophone and Francophone areas will outline the chief characteristics of the history reconfigured by Caribbean writers.

Alejo Carpentier's fiction clearly aims to counter the dispossession of the past suffered by the Caribbean people. It responds to Eurocentric assertions that the Caribbean has played an insignificant role in world history by demonstrating how on

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<sup>4</sup> On this subject, see Patricia Saunders' Ph.D. thesis 'Beyond Caliban: (Dis)forming Identity and Being in Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean Literature', University of Pittsburgh, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> K. Balutansky, 'Naming Caribbean Women Writers: A Review Essay', *Callaloo* 13 (1990), pp. 539-550. See also her 'Creating her Own Image: Female Genesis in *Mémoire d'une amnésique* and *Moi, Tituba sorcière...*', in *L'héritage de Caliban*, ed. by Maryse Condé, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-47, and Sylvia Wynter, 'Afterword: Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the "Demonic Ground" of Caliban's "Woman"', in *Out of the Kumbia*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, pp. 355-372. Abena P. A. Busia takes up the trope of Sycorax in an African context (on the basis that in Shakespeare's play Sycorax was captured from Algiers) in 'Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female', *Cultural Critique* 0882-4371 (Winter 1989-90).

the contrary the region's involvement has been crucial in the subsequent development of historical processes whose impetus seemed initially restricted to Europe. In *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier focuses on the Haitian struggle for nationhood, largely generated by the European spirit of the Enlightenment and more specifically by the French Revolution, with its first abolition of slavery. Yet the novel also reveals the crucial role of Africa and African beliefs as a source of spiritual comfort and catalyst for the slave rebellion triggered by Boukman, which led to independence. In *El Siglo de las Luces*, Carpentier chooses to set a large part of the action in Cuba, Guadeloupe and French Guyana during the French Revolution and its aftermath. This eminently European phenomenon is thus seen entirely from a Caribbean perspective: the periphery moves to the centre of the action, while what had so far been conventionally viewed as the centre is pushed to the margins.

The focus on revolutionary periods for these two novels also points to Carpentier's conviction that history is to be conceived as a collective undertaking, rather than as the accomplishment of exceptional individuals such as the Frenchmen General Leclerc and Victor Hughes, or even the Haitians Mackandal, Boukman, Henri Christophe, and Ogé. Ordinary Caribbean people such as Ti-Noel for the earlier text, and Esteban and Sofía for the later one, on which the narrative focuses and whose point of view prevails, are thus re-inserted in the region's past, and shown to have played an important part in its evolution. Further still, at the end of *El Siglo de las Luces*, the Cubans Esteban and Sofía are shown to have an influence on the course of Spanish history, for they decide to join the 2 de mayo uprising in Madrid. Thus the author is indicating that if the metropolises determine in large part the evolution of their colonies, this is in fact a two-way process. Significantly, though, in both novels, history makers are men: Ti Noel, Henri Christophe and Leclerc in the first, Victor Hughes and Esteban in the second. Despite the space devoted to her, Pauline Bonaparte, Napoleon's sister and Leclerc's wife, remains marginal to the large-scale events of *El reino de este mundo*; as do the more sketchy female characters, Henri Christophe's wife and Ti Noel's female companions. Even the role that Josephine allegedly played in the re-establishment of slavery, as a rich Martiniquan Creole and the wife of Bonaparte, receives no attention. Similarly, although she states throughout the novel 'Hay que hacer algo', it is not until the end of *El Siglo de las Luces* that Sophie is presented as a maker of history too. This representation of the role of women in history-making will be taken up further on.

A final characteristic of Carpentier's conception of history is its non-linear, cyclical nature. This is especially clear in the earlier novel:

El anciano comenzaba a desesperarse ante ese *inacabable retoñar de cadenas*, ese *renacer de grillos*, esa proliferación de miserias, que los más resignados acababan por aceptar como prueba de la *inutilidad de toda rebeldía* (*El reino de este mundo*, p. 139, emphasis added).

[Ti Noel] comprendía, ahora, que *el hombre nunca sabe para quién padece y espera. Padece y espera y trabaja para gentes que nunca conocerá*, y que a su vez padecerán y esperarán y trabajarán para otros que tampoco serán felices (pp. 143-144, emphasis added).

The sense of pessimism that emerges from these two quotes suggests that, unlike much of the Western tradition, history is not equated with continuing development and progress.<sup>6</sup> This in turn implies that if Western imperialism and colonialism were perhaps an inevitable phase of European evolution, this phase is not necessarily a step forward for humanity. Carpentier thus undermines the very ideological basis of the Western colonial enterprise, commonly presented as a civilising mission.

Unlike Carpentier, Derek Walcott urges New World writers to transcend history: 'The truly tough aesthetic of the New World', he claims 'neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force'.<sup>7</sup> He adds: 'it is not the pressure of the past which torments great poets but the weight of the present' (p. 4). Walcott envisages New World history as 'fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory' (p. 2). The past cannot be recovered because 'In time the slave surrendered to amnesia. That amnesia is the true history of the New World' (p. 4). As the St Lucian poet sees it, New World writers should 'reject the idea of history as time for its original concept as myth' (p. 2), for a conception of history as time only produces 'a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of the slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of the masters' (p. 2). While questioning the traditional approach to the past of postcolonial Caribbean writers, Walcott still regards history as central, as evidenced by his poetry. His essay exposes his conception of history.

Indeed, the new history outlined by Walcott presents several characteristics that will be useful for the examination of women writers later on in this chapter. Firstly,

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<sup>6</sup> Two European thinkers, however, contributed decisively to Carpentier's cyclical conception of history: Oswald Spengler (*The Decline of the West*, 1918-1922) and Giambattista Vico (*Scienza Nuova*, 1725).

<sup>7</sup> 'The Muse of History', p. 2, in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, ed. by Orde Coombs, New York: Anchor Press, 1974, pp. 1-27.

the St Lucian writer sees 'history, that Medusa of the New World' (p. 2) as petrifying, and therefore useless. He warns against the dangers of replacing Eurocentric myths by new, Caribbean ones (especially pan-African ones), if history is to be understood as a dynamic process that has any relevance to the present. Secondly, Walcott's reference to collective amnesia symbolises the Caribbean people's dispossession of their past via the Middle Passage – both because of the trauma of the experience and because of the bias of the only testimonies of that time, left by administrators and beneficiaries of the institution of slavery. This idea Walcott encapsulated elsewhere in the phrase 'The Sea is History'.<sup>8</sup> Yet the poet also stresses here that any re-writing of history is by necessity an invention: the truth cannot be uncovered (it lies at the bottom of the sea, or in the traumatised collective unconscious), because of the unreliability of memory. By implication, any reconstitution of the past (whether historical or fictional) is only partially true, and the veracity of these accounts is only relative.

This notion of relativity casts a completely new light on the function of history. It is in stark contrast with the European tradition, which, Édouard Glissant notes, is atavistic, that is to say engaged in the search for a unique origin (the Original Father) and the principle of the absolute, or the universal (l'Un), as opposed to creolised cultures, characterised by the diverse (*Introduction à une poétique du Divers*, pp. 34-37). Glissant's conception of history as formulated in *Le Discours antillais* is certainly one of the most complex and comprehensive among Caribbean thinkers. Glissant's theory largely overlaps with Walcott's and Carpentier's. But while Walcott warns against an obsession with history, Glissant agrees with Carpentier that New World writers need to redress the accounts of the Caribbean past bequeathed by Eurocentric historiography. Unlike Carpentier and Walcott, who speak from (nominally) independent or autonomous countries, Glissant writes from a region still under French rule and apparently unlikely to break away from its colonial status in a near future: Martinique, and more widely speaking the French Caribbean. Together with Walcott, Glissant rejects the notion that history is a succession of dates and events: in the French Antilles, such an understanding of

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<sup>8</sup> Title of a poem in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1979, reprinted by Jonathan Cape, London, 1980). This amnesia, the poem suggests, not only affected the descendants of African slaves, but those of indentured Indians too, and in fact, most of the people constituting the Caribbean, including the Caribs who committed mass suicide by throwing themselves into the sea from a cliff, and the whites.



history (promoted by Eurocentric scholars) would only yield a series of disconnected facts, because virtually all the events on which traditional historiography focuses find their origin and explanation outside of the region, in France. Thus, Glissant claims, the French Antilles are in a state of *non histoire*.

Such a claim relates to the political status of the French Caribbean, where no rebellion or local action has succeeded in bringing about significant changes such as independence or the abolition of slavery. Luis Rafael Sánchez likewise remarks that Puerto Rico, which shares with the French Caribbean the near exclusivity of being the last colonies in the area, has been erased from world history books, for it offers no memorable rebellion or noteworthy bloodshed.<sup>9</sup> Glissant argues that the cure for the slave's amnesia – all the more severe in the DOM (or Puerto Rico) because it is partly intentional, since the great majority of the population would rather deceive themselves with the myth of *départementalisation* (or *estadismo asociado*) and welcome the concomitant assimilation to the French (or US), than face their colonial reality – is to re-write, or in fact write, the authentic history of the Antilles.<sup>10</sup> And since partial, pro-colonial accounts based on traditional historiography constitute most of the 'history' of the region, Glissant believes that today the Caribbean writer, drawing on his poetic imagination, is more suited than the historian to reconstitute the side of the story that has fallen into oblivion.

He therefore devotes himself to this task in his novels, which all share, in varying degrees, a concern for history, and more particularly for the absence of a reliable, written history of the Caribbean, a void which Glissant strives to fill. Glissant's historiography is unconventional. Defying chronology and linearity, it relies on discontinuity. Temporal markers are no longer a date system artificially imposed by the West (the only culture to which these dates are truly relevant), but natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The action moves back and forth in time and historical events traditionally considered to be

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<sup>9</sup> In 'Puerto Rico para principiantes', Conference address given at 'Convergences and Interferences: New Intercultural Practices', University of Antwerp, 6-8 April 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Arcadio Díaz-Quinones concurs with Sánchez and Glissant regarding the historical insignificance of Puerto Rico: 'En el saber institucionalizado en las universidades de los Estados Unidos, el lugar de Puerto Rico es muy incierto. Como no es ni "latinoamericano" ni "norteamericano", termina por borrarse. Muchos no ven ahí ni sujeto histórico, ni fines. La historia puertorriqueña es un relato que no cuenta, y que, por consiguiente, no se cuenta'. This imperialistic attitude to Puerto Rican history results in the collective amnesia of Puerto Ricans, what he calls 'la memoria rota', that is, 'un pasado que se desea reprimir, y que llevó a la destrucción de los templos, de la continuidad' (*La memoria rota*, San Juan: Ediciones Huracán, 1996, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1993, p. 79).

important lose significance. In *La Case du commandeur*, the proclamation of the abolition of slavery, for instance, is presented as futile because it was an external decision *imposed on* rather than *coming from* the Caribbean people, and most of all because it brought no real change to the condition of the newly freed slaves: the abolition only occurred on paper. Thus to Glissant, the real history of the Caribbean is not found in records, but in collective memory: it is experienced.

As examined in the next section, such thorough revisions of conventional historiography in order to apply a model that more aptly renders the Caribbean past still fail to integrate women.

### Gender and nation-building in Caribbean writing

Few male writers of the region set the issue of gender on their agenda. Women nowhere appear prominently in most of these new versions of history. In Carpentier, until the 1970s women are simply not seen as history makers. Furthermore, the figures of the maroons Mackandal and Boukman are crucial in *El reino de este mundo*, while a passage of *El Siglo de las Luces* stresses the importance of the role of maroons, all male, across the Americas.<sup>11</sup> The glorification of the maroon Papa Longoué, who dominates all of Glissant's fiction until the 1987 *Mahogany* (especially *La Lézarde*, 1958, *Le Quatrième Siècle*, 1964, and *La Case du commandeur*, 1981), produces the same effect. James Arnold points out that unlike in the Greater Antilles, in the small French islands the practice of *marronnage* never reached important proportions, because the runaway slaves, having little mountainous forest to escape to, were usually rapidly recaptured by their masters ('The Gendering of *créolité*', p. 29). This contrasts with the situation in Jamaica and Haiti, where the historiography records several heroic maroons, including Nanny and the controversial Cudjoe, and Mackandal and Boukman. So Glissant's version of history remains a fiction, and he justifies this artistic licence with the necessity to offer a positive image of masculinity to the French Antillean man.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The text cites the examples of Miguel (Venezuela), Ganga-Zumba and Zumbi (Brasil), Cudjoe (Jamaica), Mackandal and Boukman (Haiti), Zan-Zan (Boston) and Arabay (Suriname). See Julio Ariza González, 'El fundamento histórico de la narrativa afro-antillana' in *The Caribbean Literature in Comparison*, ed. by Joe Pereira, Mona: UWI Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1990, pp. 96-104.

<sup>12</sup> Yet Richard D. E. Burton shows in *Le Roman marron: études sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) that if in Martinique the practice of *marronnage* declined from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, in Guadeloupe the number of maroons actually increased after 1794, as a result of the first abolition of slavery pronounced by the French

In the section of *Le Discours antillais* entitled 'Histoire et littérature', Glissant argues that both making and recording official history in Martinique (and the Caribbean) were the prerogatives of the Other, that is the white, male French colonial official, who held the administrative, executive, judicial, political, and part of the economic power, and produced all kinds of records such as registers, laws, and travel notes. As a result, written history was the exclusive version of the coloniser, and only the Caribbean woman stood a chance of acceding to (unofficial) power, as the official's mistress, while the man had no such prospect. He was politically emasculated by the colonial system:

l'histoire officielle de la Martinique [...] a été conçue à partir de la liste des découvreurs et des gouverneurs de ce pays, sans compter les souveraines – à défaut de souverains – qu'il a engendrées. (Ce sont là en effet des chapitres-clés de l'histoire officielle. L'élite martiniquaise ne conçoit la 'grandeur' que par la cuisine. Impératrice, sultane, favorite: l'Histoire ici n'est qu'une soumission de plaisir, où le mâle domine; le mâle, c'est l'Autre. Le plaisir historique est de se faire avoir.), (*Le Discours antillais*, p. 139).

In Glissant's scheme, this only leaves the French Caribbean man with two alternatives: to comply within the slave society or to rebel outside of it, two attitudes polarised in the images of the house-slave and the maroon.<sup>13</sup> Glissant therefore proceeds to glorify *marronnage*, establishing a myth of the maroon. Yet since maroon communities were numerically dominated by men (two to one woman in pre-1750 Guadeloupe), the women's condition as mothers making it difficult for them to escape successfully, such a focus on this primarily masculine form of resistance, together with the systematic representation of the maroon as invariably male, has led to a minimisation or obliteration of women's contribution to the nationalist struggle.<sup>14</sup> Thus the only woman who resists assimilation to the end in *La*

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Revolution, which was cancelled in 1804. The British occupation of Martinique between 1789 and 1797 prevented such temporary abolition, hence the absence of recrudescence in *marronnage*. Together with Suriname, Burton notes, Guadeloupe was the only Caribbean colony where this practice remained significant after 1800. Even in Jamaica, Cudjoe's treaty with the colonial power in 1738 eventually contained the phenomenon. It is precisely the existence of *marronnage* in the recent collective memory of Guadeloupe, Burton argues, that made it possible for Glissant and other Martiniquan writers before him to elaborate the myth of the maroon. But like Arnold, Burton points out that this myth defied historical facts in many ways.

<sup>13</sup> As Arnold comments: 'For all his lucidity, Glissant nowhere posits a way to break out of this emasculating logic' ('The Gendering of *créolité*', p. 26).

<sup>14</sup> The depiction of other forms of *marronnage* would have allowed for a more adequate inclusion of women's participation in the nation-building process. Indeed, in *Le Roman marron*, Richard Burton recalls that in slavery times there existed two kinds of *marronnage*, 'grand' and 'petit marronnage'. The former refers to the conventional maroon, who set up an independent society on the *mornes*. Alternatively, a slave could turn to *petit marronnage*, regularly escaping from the

*Case du commandeur* is the slave with the flower, who kills her new-born child conceived by rape on the slave ship.<sup>15</sup> Yet in comparison to the male rebellion such an act of female resistance seems minimised: the woman remains unnamed and does not transcend the status of symbol, unlike the central figure of Papa Longoué. More importantly, her triumph is ephemeral, since she drifts into madness and dies soon after her infanticide. This marginalisation of women from the nation-building process is also clearly illustrated in the contrasting fates of Mycéa and Mathieu. While the first ends alienated and crushed by her country's past and destiny, the second succeeds in finding a meaning to his life and a role within the nationalist struggle through his function as an historian.<sup>16</sup> The same could be said of Max Jeanne's *La Chasse au racoon*, relating the May 1967 riots in Guadeloupe: here the female character purely functions to give birth, on the heroic site of Matouba itself, to a future male fighter for freedom.

Glissant was neither the sole nor the first Caribbean writer to rely on the trope of the Maroon. Mythic maroons are in fact already found in Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, where they are also envisaged as founders of the Caribbean nations and cultures, and father figures of the Caribbean people, as epitomised in Toussaint Louverture. The poem also makes use of symbolic geography as another paradigm for the relationship between colonised and coloniser. The hills – the maroons' domain – naturally become a site of resistance, while the plains and lowlands – the slaves' environment – become associated with passivity and the acceptance of the colonial order. Thus the description of Fort-de-France as 'cette

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plantation for a determined period and then returning. House slaves practised many other forms of *petit marronnage* from poisoning their masters, through burning or sabotaging their house, to collaborating in the preparation of uprisings (usually planned by maroons), or simply ensuring the survival of maroon settlements by providing stolen food supplies. Later, Caribbean intellectuals have used the concept of *marronnage* to refer to the resistance to (cultural) assimilation by the slave and then the colonised, as in Depestre's concept of 'marronnage idéologique' and 'marronnage culturel', or Glissant's 'marronnage intellectuel'. In the ideological field, Burton sees the persistence of the distinction between *grand* and *petit marronnage*, the first being hailed through the maroon figure as in Césaire and Glissant, the second as practised by Chamoiseau and Confiant in their writing, which rehabilitates the *conteur* as a figure of resistance.

<sup>15</sup> *La Case du commandeur*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Bernadette Cailler argues in 'Édouard Glissant: A Creative Critic' (*World Literature Today*, 63: 4, Autumn 1989, pp. 589-592) that from *Mahagony*, Glissant ceased to glorify the Maroon. She notes 'the ghostlike epiphanies of the Negator in the later texts, or his frequently derisory, or even frankly shameful, banditlike reincarnations' (p. 590), and that this shift to a new vision of the Caribbean hero already began to be sensed in the 1975 novel *Malemort*. Glissant's conception of history thus evolved in his later fiction, in that it no longer relies on individual (male) heroism, but places increasing emphasis on collective action, more integrative of women. This adjustment may well have been at least partly brought about by the fictionalised accounts of history of women writers who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (especially Lacrosil, Schwarz-Bart, and Condé).

ville plate' is a condemnation of the docility of the Martiniquans, content with the political status quo. An explicit reference to flatness as a sign of docility in the poem is found in the passage of the *nègre* on the tramway, where the poet realises his own cowardice in siding with the whites rather than with his African fellow:

Ma lâcheté retrouvée!  
 [...]
 Mon héroïsme, quelle farce!  
 Cette ville [Fort-de-France] est à ma taille.  
 Et mon âme est couchée. Comme cette ville dans la  
 crasse et dans la boue couchée (p. 41).

Or even:

Je dis que cela est bien ainsi.  
 Je vis pour *le plus plat de mon âme*.  
 Pour le plus terne de ma chair!  
 Tiède petit matin de chaleur et de *peur* ancestrales je *tremble* maintenant du commun  
 tremblement que notre chant *docile* chante dans le madrépore (pp. 43-44, emphasis added).

If Glissant is heir to Césaire in his use of the Maroon paradigm, he also takes on his symbolic geography, which in turn allows him to establish parallel dichotomies between hills and plains, masculinity and femininity, resistance and docility. In Glissant's poetic system, the *morne* (hill), where the resistance to colonialism and slavery is located (embodied in the maroon), is dominated by the masculine. To the *morne* Glissant opposes the *plaine*, where the plantation subjugates the slaves, and which, significantly, figures in his writing as dominated by women: 'L'esprit sérieux qui règne sur le morne', André notes, 'contraste singulièrement avec le "rythme futillement femelle" qui gagne la plaine' (*Caraïbales*, p. 130). Yet, although men outnumbered women in maroon communities across the Caribbean, women did maroon too. Nevertheless, with the exception of the Jamaican Nanny, who here again incarnates the nation, female maroons hardly ever figure in Caribbean writing.

Arnold sees in this interpretation of colonial power – the belief that the colonised male can only be a supermale or a castrated male – enunciated by Glissant but already present in Césaire's *négritude* and taken up by the advocates of *créolité*, the very seed of the *masculinism* of French Caribbean discourse, which women writers have to challenge with a *womanist* response to avoid being silenced. Arnold ascribes the absence of homosexual writing in the French Caribbean, and Fanon's vehement denial of homosexuality in Martinique, to this polarisation of literary theories along gender lines. He further notes that such symbolic geography remains inscribed in

French Caribbean writing right up to the mid-1980s, when a new, mostly urban generation of writers (notably Patrick Chamoiseau, Xavier Orville, Raphaël Confiant, and Daniel Maximin) introduced a 'shift of emphasis from the *mornes* to the towns' ('The Gendering of *créolité*', p. 28).

By figuring the debilitation of colonisation as emasculation and envisioning women as accomplices of the colonial order, Glissant's argument echoes that of René Marqués. René Marqués contends in 'El puertorriqueño dócil' that the lack of political power of the male local population in colonial Puerto Rico resulted in their emasculation. His essay is a response to the continental literary critic Alfred Kazin who claimed that the Puerto Ricans are a docile people. Marqués seeks to trace the origin of such docility not in biology or genetics, as Kazin does in his article, but in the political status of the island. In Marqués's view, the direct causes of the present-day Puerto Rican's docility are the island's lack of political autonomy and the fierce ideological brainwashing to which its inhabitants are subjected by the colonial power. However, he notes, the Puerto Rican is prone to aggressiveness, but this is 'una violencia por desesperación' (p. 160) always ultimately self-destructive, which translates into a strong suicidal tendency, reflected in the large-scale participation in the Korean War. On this last point he observes in relation to Valcárcel's story 'El soldado Damián':

Damián Sánchez, [...] víctima a manos de sus compañeros y oficiales norteamericanos, en vez de reaccionar contra éstos, desahoga su furia, de modo aparentemente ilógico, golpeando injusta, viciosa y cruelmente a su amigo coreano, único ser a quien puede en ese momento considerar más débil o 'inferior' que él mismo (p. 160).

He adds:

El ejemplo señalado nos da la clave de por qué una sociedad 'pacífica' y 'tolerante' como lo es la puertorriqueña puede producir una literatura de violencia. Los actos violentos de los personajes literarios [...] no son, en último análisis, producto de una doctrina revolucionaria, [...] sino más bien de la desesperación de seres débiles y dóciles acorralados en el último reducto de la dignidad humana (ibid.)

Marqués further clarifies the connection between misguided violence and the colonised's lack of political power, as he extends his comments to several texts dealing with the theme of nationalism, in which action (or involvement in the nationalist struggle) invariably leads the protagonist to destruction.

While women managed to maintain political control via relationships with colonial officers (what Glissant terms 'par la cuisse'), their male counterparts could resort to no such subterfuge. With the US invasion and annexation and its

concomitant disruption of social patterns, Marqués continues, the *machista* order was further jeopardised. Indeed, according to Marqués *machismo* is challenged by the introduction in the 1940s of Anglo-Saxon feminist values, which he calls ‘el patrón matriarcal estilo anglosajón’. Since in his view *machismo* is ‘el último baluarte cultural desde donde podía aún combatirse, en parte, la docilidad colectiva’ (p. 175), the last chance of national liberation has therefore vanished, all the more so since the pernicious effects of US feminism were accentuated by the mass emigration encouraged in the 1950s by the government’s assimilationist policy, which has bled the island of its male population. Thus Marqués envisages male emigration as a form of political emasculation, fearing that numerical superiority will strengthen women’s power and further erode the traditional Puerto Rican *machista* values. He consequently congratulates his contemporaries on their negative portrayal of women in their fiction, which, as he sees it, expresses their opposition to the ‘Anglo-Saxon patriarchy’. Notwithstanding Marqués’s highly debatable qualification of US values as ‘matriarchal’, the sexism underlying his analysis, just like Glissant’s notion of ‘grandeur par la cuisse’, could not be more patent. Here the *machista* Puerto Rican male figures in the same way as the Maroon in Glissant’s early writing. Together with Lamming, both authors rely on the assumption that national liberation is a masculine task. Both suffer from what could be termed the ‘Malinche syndrome’, that is, the conviction that their very nature, or rather male perception of them as objects of desire, makes women treacherous, consenting preys to the colonisers.

The thinkers who subsequently emerged in the Hispanic and Francophone areas have not envisioned colonisation in such gendered terms. Yet in the French Antilles, the theory elaborated by Chamoiseau and Confiant in response to Césaire and Glissant continues to marginalise women from the nation-building process, and more specifically, to minimise their role in the cultural production of the region. Indeed, in *Lettres créoles* Chamoiseau and Confiant posit the *habitation* – the small plantation characteristic of Guadeloupe and Martinique whose size did not allow for the large-scale *latifundio* of the American continent and the Greater Antilles – as the cradle of Creole culture, which they regard as the authentic culture of the region.<sup>17</sup> There, they maintain, the major ethnic groups and various social classes that were to

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature (Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, 1635-1975)*, Paris: Hatier, 1991.

give birth to the linguistic and cultural mosaic of the French Antilles interacted with each other, in contrast to what happened in the *mornes* inhabited exclusively by the maroons. This shift of geographical emphasis from the isolated *mornes* to the *habitation* based principally in the plains and in the proximity of small towns, had major consequences in the regional mainstream theories, for it supposed the inclusion of the white Creoles or *békés* in a discourse hitherto resolutely Afro-centred. The *créolistes* highlight the connection between *habitation*, plains, and the wider colonial infrastructure: ‘L’habitation [...] est une unité de production autonome qui vit d’elle-même, sur elle-même. Elle occupe d’abord les terres plates [...], puis grimpe les mornes [...]. Seulement l’habitation n’est pas seule. Autour d’elle, se tisse la présence métropolitaine’ (*Lettres créoles*, p. 36). Still little attention is paid, however, to the other major ethnic group, the Indo-Caribbean people.

In addition to this move away from Afro-centrism, the theory put forward by Chamoiseau and Confiant disposes of the mythic figure of the Maroon, whose very absence from the *habitation* (since he had escaped from it) makes him ineligible for the role of transmitter of Creole culture. As Arnold points out, the *créolistes* thereby support Glissant’s contention that no ordinary path to power is open to the male Antillean, since power is the prerogative of the colonial official. Instead of offering the supermale (the Maroon) as an exemplary figure, they glorify the other extreme, the ‘castrated’ male: the *conteur*. For they claim that in order to preserve his function, the *conteur* will have to compose and co-operate with the colonial authority (the master of the *habitation*). Such a collaboration, they argue, is what made the birth of a Creole culture possible. The *conteur*, therefore, is an Uncle Tom figure that should be praised. Yet, here again, the *créolistes* ascribe this role to the figure of the *male* storyteller. This last point will be taken up in the next chapter.

The next section examines the various ways in which women writers have contested such perceptions of the involvement of Caribbean women in the historical process.

### **From ‘History’ to ‘his/story’ to ‘hystory’: the women writers**

Max Jeanne’s assertion that ‘Les sociétés antillaises souffrent d’amnésie quant à leur passé’, and that ‘A la limite, on peut même dire que ce sont des sociétés sans



histoire, dans la mesure où “la mémoire collective” leur fait cruellement défaut’ echoes Glissant.<sup>18</sup> So does his call for the need to rewrite the history from the point of view of the Caribbean people as a palliative for this amnesia: ‘Aujourd’hui encore, et quoi qu’il puisse paraître, il n’est pas anachronique de relater encore et encore les faits marquants de notre passé, de notre formation en tant que peuple’. Jeanne sees this as the ‘la tâche fondamentale de l’écrivain et surtout une des dernières chances pour nous de prendre un jour “l’initiative historique” d’en finir avec l’histoire-subie, “l’histoire-stop”’ (p. 131). For Jeanne as for Carpentier, Glissant or Lamming, therefore, rewriting history is a political act inscribed in a wider programme: the achievement or re-assertion of cultural, economic and political independence. Yet Jeanne criticises his compatriots Lacrosil, Manicom, Schwarz-Bart and Condé for producing what he calls *intimist* literature, whose characteristics he enumerates as such: ‘récit à la première personne du singulier, analyse psychologique, aliénation, rapports conflictuels avec l’homme antillais’ all of which, in his opinion, ‘semble aller à contre-courant des luttes socio-politiques’ (p. 132). To this literature he opposes the novels of the Martiniquans Glissant, Placol and Orville, where ‘la diversité et la richesse des thèmes traités sont beaucoup plus grandes’ (p. 132). Since Guadeloupean literature continues to be dominated by women whose production is not, according to Jeanne’s criteria, appropriate literature, while in Martinique male writers prevail, Jeanne logically concludes: ‘Le roman guadeloupéen est encore à naître. Il est urgent que des romanciers *authentiques* y travaillent. [...] La littérature guadeloupéenne est une des plus pauvres des Antilles’ (p. 133).

This article is symptomatic of a masculinist literary criticism commonly found in the Caribbean, which elaborates canons in such terms that these become exclusive, whether by race (as in much pan-Africanist criticism, for instance) or gender. In *Out of the Kumbla* Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido denounce the ‘critical perceptions, at first colonialist and sexist, now neo-colonialist and sexist, which obliterate the existence of the woman, *which fail to read the woman’s text, which place negative values on women’s issues, and which consequently marginalize or even erase Caribbean women writers*’ (p. 27, emphasis added). This comment remarkably fits Jeanne, for whom social issues should be subordinated to the

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Entretien avec Max Jeanne’, p. 131, in *Les Antilles dans l’impasse?*, ed. by Alain Brossat and Daniel Maragnès, Paris: Editions Caribéennes/L’Harmattan, 1981, pp. 129-135.

nationalist struggle, and who in particular dismisses the importance of gender relations in the Caribbean. Jeanne has no interest in the reasons for which women write in this 'intimistic' way, nor does he recognise the potential value of this *intimisme*. While his call for the elaboration of a nationalist literary corpus is certainly understandable in a postcolonial context, his criteria for literary authenticity and usefulness in the achievement of the wider goal of nationhood are extremely restrictive. Although in his article Jeanne discusses the treatment of history in Caribbean fiction separately from the issue of women's intimism, it would be fruitful to examine how intimism also affects the way in which the texts by Lacrosil, Condé, Schwarz-Bart and other women writers engage with the past, from a perspective other than that of heroism.

The version of history women writers propose is indeed often intimist, for women writers tend to concentrate on private events, 'the domestic' (in Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid's words), and to personalise external events. Kincaid tells Donna Perry in an interview: 'I sort of think about [politics] as part of my domestic life. In fact, *I think I reduce everything to a domestic situation*. [...] If I actually ran the world, I'd do it from the kitchen. [...] that's just how I understand things. [...] The idea that things are impersonal occurrences is very alien to me. *I personalize everything*' (*Caribbean Women Writers*, pp. 503-504, emphasis added). In some way such an approach is not dissimilar to that of Glissant, for whom natural disasters, which people *experience* in an intimate way, are more adequate temporal markers than dates, which merely *record* events. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of this *intimisme*, the female version of history is more challenging and demystifying than the male variant: it questions both the colonial and the newly reconfigured historiographies, on the grounds that they are equally masculinist.<sup>19</sup> By adding the missing factor, gender, to their agenda, women go further in their re-imagination of the Caribbean past. As will be shown shortly, they challenge their male counterparts, whose re-appropriation of history and obsession with heroic figures actually reproduce the patterns of Eurocentric historiography: a focus on a few individuals considered to be the 'makers' of history, the distortion of truth

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<sup>19</sup> In an interview granted on 6 January 1998, Gisèle Pineau commented that, while most of her male contemporaries are concerned with the chronicle of the Caribbean and the collective experience (reflected in the use of the 'nous' in Glissant and Chamoiseau), her own interest lies more on the individual. But both approaches meet at some point: as shown later in relation to Pineau's short story, a focus on the individual is not necessarily exclusive of an engagement with history.

through the erasure of embarrassing details, and the absence of recognition of the role of women.

Indeed, Richard Burton points to the strong escapist inclination of Martiniquan writers when he notes that, with the exception of Tony Delsham, they all avoid dealing with contemporary issues in their texts, silencing the problems plaguing Caribbean societies today: incest, domestic and sexual violence, rivalry between Indo- and Afro-Antilleans or between blacks and mulattoes, vast class and economic differences, and increasingly so, crime and drugs. Referring specifically to Glissant, Burton also remarks how the average Antillean's relation to history differs from the intellectual's. He suggests: 'Si les Antillais n'ont pas "fait du Nègre marron [leur] héros tutélaire", peut-être est-ce parce qu'ils se doutent que cet "héroïsme" n'est pas exempt de scories' (*Le Roman marron*, p. 63). This *passéiste* tendency is not so strong in the Hispanic area, although it remains frequent in Puerto Rico.

Burton's comment, if it is true for the major (and male) Martiniquan writers, hardly applies to the women writers from Guadeloupe (such as Condé, Schwarz-Bart, Pineau, Telchid and Bébel-Gisler), Haiti (Danticat, Micheline Dusseck and Yanick Lahens, among others), or even the Martiniquan Suzanne Dracius Pinalie. Where their male counterparts frequently escape into a more or less recent past, women writers are clearly less reticent about depicting the social evils of the emerging Caribbean nations – for instance, racial or social prejudices and conflictive gender relations – dismissed by writers such as Max Jeanne because of their potentially divisive effect. Due to their status as outsiders in society and literary circles, Caribbean women writers have long adopted a critical position: Maryse Condé asserts that their depiction of society is 'autrement plus percutante, critique' than that of their male counterparts (*Entretiens avec Maryse Condé*, p. 33), an assertion made in relation to the French Caribbean that can easily be extended to Haiti and the Hispanic Antilles, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, and to the rest of the region.

Although Clarisse Zimra agrees with Jeanne that: 'reflecting neo-colonialist reality, female narratives remained narrowly intimistic' (p. 144), she also points out with Burton that Caribbean (male) writers' attempt to fill in the blanks of local history with heroic figures such as Toussaint Louverture has produced a mythical version of history from which (with the exception of Nanny of the Maroons)

'females seem conspicuously absent' (p. 145).<sup>20</sup> She attributes the difference in the attitudes of male and women writers towards history to socialisation: having been 'socialised as other/wise', women 'conceive of heroism as Other/defined'. Hence their belief that writing about 'His/story' is 'a male prerogative'. In the Francophone Caribbean, the fiction of Marie Chauvet, Michèle Lacroisil, Simone Schwarz-Bart and above all Maryse Condé has confronted this conception of history.

Chauvet had no need to focus on a distant past, and so history does not figure prominently in her fiction: instead, *Amour, colère et folie* denounces the coming to power of Duvalier and the cruelty of his regime. In *Demain Jab Herma*, Lacroisil engages more directly with the past: not only does she undermine the legitimacy of history, rendered unreliable by its dependence on memory and the impulse to mythologising, but she also questions the validity of the elaboration of a heroic past, irrelevant to the present-day situation of the French Antilles. Lacroisil's text implies that the obsession of the main characters and the rest of the community with Delgrès and his heroic, suicidal resistance to Napoleon's troops does little to remedy the sugar crisis of the 1950s: quite on the contrary, it actually paralyses the population who do not take their future into their own hands. Thus, in Zimra's words, Lacroisil conducts 'an oblique indictment of black ideologies posited on a glorious past, the Afro-American brothers and *primus inter pares*, the *Négritude* prophets included' (p. 155). In *Ti Jean L'Horizon* (1979) Schwarz-Bart undermines the myth of the Original Father by having, as Zimra puts it, an 'untrustworthy Ancestor [sending] the son on a false African quest from which there was no coming back' (p. 156), which, here again, can be read as a critique of *Négritude*. Thus Schwarz-Bart shows that in the Caribbean context, where first the Middle Passage and then the institution of slavery erased the patriarchal genealogy, the Original Father must be discarded in favour of the Original Mother, and this is evidenced in *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, where the name of Lougandor is passed on from mother to daughter.

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<sup>20</sup> In 'Righting the Calabash: Writing History in the Female Francophone Narrative', in *Out of the Kumbia*, *op.cit.*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, pp. 143-159. Along with Glissant's fictional Longoué, Toussaint Louverture features in two plays published in 1961, *Monsieur Toussaint* by Glissant and *Toussaint Louverture* by Césaire, who has also devoted a play to Henry Christophe (*La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, 1963), and a poem to Delgrès ('Mémorial de Louis Delgrès', 1959).

But it is certainly Maryse Condé's writing which offers the most direct confrontation with history. The author signals the erasure of women from Caribbean historiography:

Le rôle de la femme au sein des luttes de libération antérieures et postérieures à l'abolition de l'esclavage a été largement occulté. Vivant souvent dans l'Habitation à titre de domestique (cuisinière, bonne d'enfants, lingère) elle a dans bien des cas été responsable des empoisonnements collectifs des maîtres et de leur famille, participé aux incendies des plantations, terreur du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et a marronné en nombre important. La Jamaïque a gardé le souvenir de 'Nanny of the Maroons', figure devenue légendaire qui dirigea une colonie de révoltés. La Guadeloupe, celui de la 'mulâtresse Solitude'. Outre ces deux exemples, il s'en trouve bien d'autres qu'il conviendrait de retrouver.<sup>21</sup>

In the Francophone area the first endeavour in such direction was undertaken by the French André Schwarz-Bart, in *La Mulâtresse Solitude*.<sup>22</sup> Condé followed in his footsteps with *Moi Tituba, sorcière... Noire de Salem*, where she demystifies the version of history put forward by male Caribbean authors.<sup>23</sup> Thus she discloses the pact between the British and Christopher, seemingly a fictional, Barbadian double of the widely acclaimed Cudjoe, the Jamaican leader of the maroons, who agreed to capture and deliver the new runaway slaves in return for the safety of his own maroon camp. With such revelations, not only does Condé remain more faithful to facts, but she indicates her intention to distance herself from conventional historiography. Contesting the gender-biased depiction of the maroon past (which ignores the fewer but still existing female maroons), Condé does not centre her story on Christopher, but on his female companion, Tituba, a resistant in her own way.

In *La Vie scélérate*, Condé engages with history from another, more intimist perspective: via the focus on the Louis family, the novel takes the reader through the major episodes affecting the Black Diaspora in the twentieth century, many of which are experienced by a female protagonist, Thécla.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis is thus on collective history, and the female presence during the pan-Africanist period is re-inserted. Condé's concern with collective memory is also clear in a subsequent

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<sup>21</sup> *La parole des femmes: essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Paris: Le Seuil, 1972. That André Schwarz-Bart should not be a Caribbean writer further points to the extent of masculinism of the French Caribbean literary canon up to the 1970s-1980s. Daniel Maximin's *L'isolé soleil*, *op. cit.*, also alludes to *Solitude*. More importantly, this text stresses the role of women in nation-building with figures such as the intellectual Suzanne Césaire, the Guadeloupean communist politician Gerty Archimède, and the US Civil Rights activist Angela Davies. The protagonist Siméa is also involved in the *Dissidence* movement.

<sup>23</sup> Paris: Mercure de France, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> *La Vie scélérate*, Paris: Seghers, 1987.

novel, *Traversée de la mangrove* where, as Haigh comments, Condé rewrites the mythical quest for the origins and the Original Father, and shows it to be unfruitful and counterproductive. Instead, just as one character, Emile the historian, writes a book by gathering testimonies of the elders of the community, in the novel history is conceived as a collective narrative made up of the individual stories constituting each character's own version of facts. Significantly, Haigh notes, 'it is the women's narratives – those which take place in the first person – which are most active in the process of communal "Relation"', a process which, as Glissant sees it, is at once 'le relié', 'le relatif' and 'le relaté' (*Mapping A Tradition*, p. 154).

In Cuba and the Dominican Republic, women's participation in the nationalist struggle has been more fully acknowledged than in the Francophone Caribbean. The image of the *mambisa*, for instance, appears in Cuba's official historiographies. Yet here again history is conceived as a primarily male task. Thus if Mariana Grajales is vividly remembered as one of these *mambisas*, it is significant that she should be remembered primarily as the selfless *mother* of brave *mambises* (the Maceo brothers), who exhorted all of her sons to fight the Ten Years War of Independence, despite her personal loss incurred. Although women's participation in the Independence Wars was recognised – and the obtention of many legal rights between the 1900s and 1940s was largely a reward for their role they played – *mambisas* are barely mentioned in the fictional re-writings of the past, whether by men or women. Susana Montero has shown the systematic silence (conscious or not) of Cuban Romantic poets between the 1840s and 1890s (a determinant period for the emergence of nationalism and discourses around the nation and national identity in the Hispanic Caribbean and Latin America) as regards women's involvement in the armed struggles for independence.<sup>25</sup> Their participation in the revolutionary movement is nonetheless better represented in Cuban literature – as exemplified by Marta Rojas's testimony *Tania, la guerrillera inolvidable* (1970) – no doubt at once

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<sup>25</sup> Montero further notes that this representation of Mariana Grajales has led to 'la absolutización del ejercicio de su maternaje como su única proyección social, al mismo que ha dado lugar, dentro del discurso patriótico, a un proceso metonímico de ocultamiento – no necesariamente consciente – de otros aspectos relativos a la imagen, la acción, la subjetividad, los valores y el pensamiento femeninos presentes a lo largo de nuestra historia [cubana], los que – a mi juicio – han gravitado de manera determinante en la conformación de nuestra identidad nacional' ('Presencia e incidencia de lo femenino en la modelación del sujeto nacional (indagación a la luz de la poesía romántica en contextos políticos diferenciados)', Ph.D. thesis, University of Havana, 2001, p. 1).

as a result of the social changes brought about by the Revolution, and because such representations help to rally popular support to the revolutionary cause.<sup>26</sup>

In Puerto Rico, however, women's contribution to the shaping of the country remains largely unacknowledged. María Julia Daroquí notes the same impulse to mystify history among Puerto Rican writers as that found among their French Caribbean counterparts.<sup>27</sup> She signals how the mythical figure of the *jíbaro*, or white peasant, elaborated in the 1920s and 1930s in response to the US invasion in 1898, was held by hispanophile Puerto Rican intellectuals (epitomised in Antonio Pedreira) as a symbol of nationalism, and how Hispanic culture became the weapon they used against US Anglo-Saxon values. Although later writers did not wish to be attached to Spain any more than they did to the US, this *passéisme* and inclination to *hispanismo* are displayed not only in René Marqués, notably in his essay examined above, but, Daroquí shows, in writing by all the other members of the *Generación del 50*, including Pedro Juan Soto and the early José Luis González. Such a version of history was countered by a group of writers emerging in the 1970s, notably the later José Luis González, Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, Luis López Nieves, Ana Lydia Vega, and Rosario Ferré. Daroquí distinguishes two broad trends in the treatment of history in the work of the *Generación del 70*: the first group produces a 'historia apócrifa', or a 'ficción de la utopía, de la ilusión y de la verdad' (the stance taken by Glissant), while the second casts 'miradas oblicuas de la historia', that take the form of 'el chisme, el murmullo y las leyendas populares' (p.88). Significantly, Daroquí categorises the three male authors mentioned above as adherents to the first approach, while she places the women in the second category. Their project is to narrate what could be termed Puerto Rican 'hystory': the other facet of history, that related to the private sphere, the anecdotal, in short, daily life. This inclination to the private and the anecdotal is in fact found among women writers across the region.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Luisa Campuzano ('Ponencia sobre una carencia', p. 369) cites Alfredo Reyes Trejo's *Por el rastro de los libertadores* (1973), Cintio Vitier's *De Peña Pobre* (1980), Miguel Mejides's *La habitación terrestre* (1982) as rare exceptions, while Susana Montero also mentioned to me Lisandro Otero's *En ciudad semejante*. I was unable to consult any of these texts. For more information on Cuban women's participation in nationalist struggles, see Carlos M. Coria-Sánchez, 'Breve historia de la mujer en Cuba', *Fem* 21 (December 1997, Mexico), pp. 21-26; see also Loida Figueroa, 'El papel histórico y social de la mujer en el Caribe hispano', *op. cit.*, pp. 166-168.

<sup>27</sup> In *Las pesadillas de la historia en la narrativa puertorriqueña*, Caracas: Monte Avila Editores/CELARG, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> Ana Lydia Vega notes how in traditional history curriculum 'La vida y milagros de Juan del Pueblo no cualificaba todavía para protagonizar manuales de historia. Y aún menos la de Doña

Thus Rosario Ferré's *Maldito amor* (1986) is a saga recounting the history of the Puerto Rican upper class from 1898 up to the imaginary 1990s, while García Ramis's *Felices días, tío Sergio* (1986), focusing on the urban middle class, retraces the major social changes that took place in the island since the 1950s. Both works challenge official historiography by confronting it with versions of the subalterns or the marginalised (the poor, women, and the blacks in Ferré; women and homosexuals in García Ramis). In Cuba, Lázara Castellanos's *Estudio de familia* (1989) and Aida Bahr's collection of stories *Hay un gato en la ventana* (1984) likewise deal with key historical moments from the Batista government to the first decades of the Revolution. Yet the focus is more on the individual action than on the historical event. All of these authors are thus more concerned with the daily lives of a community or a social class than with heroic deeds. In an iconoclastic fashion recalling Condé, Ana Lydia Vega debunks heroism in 'Sobre tumbas y héroes' (*Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión*, 1987), where a young couple looking for the grave of a leading figure of the independence movement of Puerto Rico ends up engaging in sexual intercourse on it.

Iris Zavala's *El libro de Apolonia* (1993) also seeks to reveal the true history of the island by recovering the black presence together with the woman's presence in Puerto Rican history. In the manner of Carpentier's Ti Noel, her protagonist Apolonia transcends human life to symbolise the black woman throughout the history of the island: from the Spanish Conquest and the age of Dutch pirates through slavery, with *marronnage* and the emancipation of 1873, to emigration to the United States and the subsequent involvement of black Puerto Ricans in the Civil Rights movements. An emphasis is put on oral, collective memory, passed down to Apolonia from her aunts, and history is conceived as a process experienced daily, rather than as a series of significant deeds and written records: history becomes story, personalised and inscribed in the lives of individuals.

Besides such dismantlements of the conventional conception of history, Hispanic Caribbean women writers have also sought to fill in the gaps of official historiography. In *La tarde en que murió Estefanía* (1983), for instance, Adelaida Cartagena Portalatín opts for a more direct confrontation of history. Like Chauvet in *Amour, colère et folie*, Cartagena Portalatín has no need to engage with a distant

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Juana' ('Nosotros los historicidas', p. 24, in *Historia y literatura*, ed. by Silvia Álvarez Curbelo and Irma Rivera Nieves, San Juan: Postdata, 1995, pp. 21-38).



past, given the very recent history of dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. Here it is the dictatorship of Trujillo that is denounced, and particular attention is given to the plight of women in that period: the dictator was a womaniser, renowned for abusing his charisma and absolute powers in the reigning climate of political terror to seduce or coerce many young women into becoming his mistresses, only to soon abandon them. This is reflected in the novel through the case of Estefanía, whose story also serves to recall the role played by women in the struggle against the *trujillato*. The novel also refers repeatedly to the Mirabal sisters, underground activists who sought to overthrow the dictator. This, as will be discussed further on, is also the theme of Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*.

Women's participation in history as it is traditionally understood is also reasserted in 'Una semana de siete días' (1976), by Magali García Ramis. The story portrays a female pro-independence political activist who sacrifices everything, including her family life, to the cause. At the end she is arrested, and her daughter waits in vain for her return. The protagonist, seen through the eyes of her young daughter, emerges as a tragic heroine, a mythical figure: this point will be discussed later on in connection with Mayra Santos's fiction.

The frequent phallocentrism displayed by male writers has thus prompted their female counterparts to a re-evaluation of history (or 'his/story', as Zimra puts it) and to provide their own version, 'hystory'. If unlike Condé in *Moi Tituba*, Gisèle Pineau, Mayra Santos Febres, Edwidge Danticat, and Julia Álvarez refrain from iconoclasm, they too challenge male-centred historiography by providing a version of history that re-inscribes Caribbean women and resists the mystification of heroism.

In their common project of narrating an alternative to Eurocentric historiography, the various accounts by Caribbean writers (male or female) share many of the main features outlined in relation to Carpentier and Glissant: the absence of linearity, a chronology revolving around natural disasters rather than man-made events, and the belief that fiction is a better way to recover an accurate picture of the past than history. The intimistic approach confers a specific slant on Pineau's version of history in 'Paroles de terre en larmes'.<sup>29</sup> In this story set during

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<sup>29</sup> In *Paroles de terre en larmes*, Paris: CGAC (Centre d'Action Culturelle de la Guadeloupe) and Hatier, 1988.

World War II, the historical events are told not through the epic account of Antilleans fighting in Europe, but as they are experienced on the home front by a Guadeloupean woman, Félicie, awaiting her lover's return from the battlefields. The story thus questions the conception of history as a series of heroic deeds. Further still, it debunks heroism throughout. Maxime is recruited for the war. A gullible victim of colonial indoctrination, he believes that his duty is to save the Mother Country: 'Tu es ma femme, mais la France est ma mère', he tells Félicie on informing her of his imminent departure (p. 6). The latter, on the contrary, can see through this patriotic rhetoric and realises that the Guadeloupeans have little to gain from this war. She warns him: 'La guerre, là-bas, c'est un "pitt à coqs". Tu vas te mêler de séparer des coqs, toi! Ils vont te crever les yeux!' (p. 9). Félicie's scepticism, her refusal to indulge in heroism, allows her to take her distance and to be more critical. Her ominous words foreshadow the end. When Maxime returns one-armed, she cannot help remarking bitterly: 'La France a gagné la guerre! Et toi, qu'est-ce que tu as gagné? Tu l'as vu, ton Général? Elle t'a reconnu, ta mère?' (p. 16). Heroism is debunked further when the veracity of the epic stories the now invalid Maxime tells on his return is denied by Félicie: 'Partout, il va raconter la guerre à sa manière, il ment, il crée un personnage. Ils sont tous là, à l'écouter, en admiration devant son bras invisible'. She highlights the discrepancy between the Maxime that appears in public and the one she knows in private: 'Dans la case, c'est un invalide que j'ai sur mon compte. Il ne peut rien faire car il lui manque un bras. Dans la rue, c'est un héros de la guerre, un voyageur, un connaisseur' (pp. 16-17).

By focusing on Félicie's home front struggle against the hardships of the war in Guadeloupe, rather than on Maxime and the battlefields in France, Pineau points out that the war effort was not solely produced on the front, but in the (predominantly female) communities left behind as well. Here the dichotomy between home front/battlefields, daily struggle/epic battles, private/public, Guadeloupe/France, story/history (or history/History) and finally women/men is clear: whereas the personal is brought to the fore, external events are relegated to the background. Such a strategy allows Pineau to reinsert women in the historical narrative, while at the same time stressing that history is not made up only of significant events, but of ordinary people's daily lives too. Through her down-to-earth character, she also voices a veiled criticism of French colonial policy. Challenging Jeanne's claim, this

short story demonstrates that it is possible to engage with history and the political while remaining focused on the individual and the intimistic.

Pineau uses the same strategy in subsequent novels. One of the ways in which history is rendered intimist in *L'Espérance-macadam* is through the quasi-total absence of references to specific historical events. There is only a fleeting allusion to the Second World War, for instance. Here the personalisation of history is even more extreme than in 'Paroles de terre en larmes': more than the war itself, Éliette remembers 1943, the year her mother died (p. 142). Virtually all the specific dates in the text refer to natural disasters or private events constituting temporal markers for Éliette and Rosette. Thus the year of the earthquake is the year Eliette's first husband, Marius, died; August 1955, when three hurricanes passed over Guadeloupe, is the reference for Éliette's first wedding; for Rosette, Angela's room was built after the 1981 hurricane which followed the birth of Rita; finally, the 1928 and 1989 hurricanes are the main temporal references of the novel. On a more individual level, deaths, births, weddings, arrivals and departures of kith and kin, Éliette's recovery of speech, or the installation of electricity are the events by which Éliette and Rosette measure the passing of time. Events happening on a wider scale thus appear to bear little consequence on their lives. As Glissant explains in connection to Martinique, conventional chronology is irrelevant to the DOM: since it mostly relates to external events, it does little to illuminate the past and present predicament of these territories: 'Il est possible de réduire notre chronologie à un squelette de "faits", n'importe lequel. [...] Une fois ce tableau chronologique dressé, complété, tout reste à débrouiller de l'histoire martiniquaise. Tout reste à découvrir de l'histoire antillaise de la Martinique' (*Le Discours antillais*, p. 27).

There are, however, two conspicuous exceptions in the novel, where specific dates refer to external events: 1936 for Éliette, when for the first time a black man, the Guadeloupean Félix Éboué, was appointed Governor of the Colonies in the French Empire, and 1981 for Rosette, the year Bob Marley died. These dates are obviously not accidental: they are both landmarks for Guadeloupeans and a wider black community asserting itself and its political rights. So historical allusions in *L'Espérance-macadam* are systematically contextualised, given a Caribbean dimension. Thus the end of the Second World War is mentioned in relation to the subsequent decolonisation period, and, for the French Caribbean, *départementalisation*: 'Et même si Papa De Gaulle avait rayé le mot Colonie de

toutes les cartes de géographie, hissé la Guadeloupe et ses dépendances au rang de départements d'Outre-Mer, [Éliette] comprenait bien que personne ne pouvait remplir son ventre de cette seule satisfaction' (p. 142).<sup>30</sup> Here the author denounces the latent hypocrisy underlying the policy of *départementalisation*. Fighting the war did not earn Antilleans (and this applies to French Antilleans as well as Puerto Ricans) the respect and equal footing with the metropole they expected, but only symbolic measures (*départementalisation* and *ELA*) aimed to disguise their colonial status.

The particular conception of time in the novel also contributes to making history more personal. As seen above, in Caribbean writing the passing of time is more often than not marked by natural disasters, most of which are recurring, or even seasonal phenomena, like the hurricanes or *cyclones* (a name that could refer to their cyclical nature as much as to their whirling winds). History is thus frequently conceived as cyclical, rather than linear. In Pineau's novel, hurricanes, more than simple temporal markers, actually stand as a metaphor for history itself.<sup>31</sup> Unlike in the Western tradition, history is therefore not conceived as a progression, but as frustrating, endless repetition. On the individual level, this cyclical structure can affect several generations of a same family. Thus the action of *L'Espérance-macadam* is framed by two hurricanes accompanied by two cases of incest perpetrated by fathers against their daughters, Éliette in 1928 and Angela in 1989. The kinship between both fathers, who turn out to be father and son, underlines the cyclical repetition: Rosette's mother Gilda rightly assumes that Rosan will inherit

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<sup>30</sup> Several local politicians and intellectuals, including its former supporter Césaire, have denounced *départementalisation* as a mask for the perpetuation of colonisation, particularly when from the early 1960s all the neighbouring countries were gradually reaching independence. *Départementalisation* brought the DOM neither more economic autonomy, nor, until at least 1996, social and political equality with the metropole.

<sup>31</sup> Today in the Caribbean, people continue to situate events in relation to natural disasters such as a hurricane, a volcano eruption or an earthquake, as opposed to man-provoked events, which in the West more frequently act as chronological markers. Thus in Guadeloupe the older generations invariably refer to the particularly violent 1928 and 1956 hurricanes, and the younger generation now joins them in categorising events as 'before' or 'after' Hugo in 1989.

Priska Degras writes in relation to *L'Espérance-macadam* and *L'Île et une nuit*, by Daniel Maximin, that in these works the hurricane symbolises 'cette Histoire violente, chaotique, tumultueuse – comme le sont toutes les Histoires coloniales' of the French Caribbean. These novels: 'font du passage cyclique et ravageur du cyclone une grande image génératrice de significations multiples, évidentes ou implicites, individuelles et collectives: le cyclone est cette imparable évidence du malheur qui fond, périodiquement, sur des populations à la fois averties mais toujours profondément atteintes par l'ampleur, non prévisible, de la catastrophe' ('Le paysage et le cyclone comme métaphores de l'Histoire dans quelques romans de la Caraïbe francophone', unpublished conference paper, ASCALF Study Day, Warwick, 17 April 1997).

his father's vice, his 'malédiction' and repeat his crime. The numerous parallels between Éliette and Angela further suggest that (family) history is forever repeating itself. For Éliette, listening to Angela's story is like experiencing the rape once again: 'Avec son histoire, Angela avait allumé les torches qui voulaient animer la poutre assassine d'un visage terrifique' (p. 231). There are other such family histories in the novel: in fact, each family seems doomed to carry on its own cycle of misery. When Rosette expels Angela from her house, for instance, she perpetuates a cycle triggered by Gilda, herself expelled by her mother for getting pregnant:

Jamais, non jamais Rosette n'avait pensé qu'un jour, elle proférerait les mêmes paroles que sa manman lui avait jetées quinze ans plus tôt [...] Et ces paroles lui étaient venues naturellement, comme si elle n'avait eu qu'à les lire, *leçon d'histoire recommencée*, sur un grand tableau noir' (p. 106, emphasis added).

The case of Glawdys, whose infanticide echoes, with a *crescendo*, her mother's abandon, constitutes another instance of history repeating itself. As shown in the previous chapter, however, individuals can break away from this cyclical fatality and make decisive changes to their own lives. Significantly, when history is conceived in this way, that is, no longer as a series of heroic deeds, but simply as social change, women turn out to be crucial agents.

History is further personalised when the chronicle is re-written into an anecdote. The story of Ésabelle and Christophe parodies the Conquest of America and the alleged relationship between Isabella of Castile and Christopher Columbus: 'Leurs cris d'amour étourdissaient Éliette. Reine Ésabelle et l'animal Christophe ruaient dans l'exaltation des premiers voyages. Les corps se frottaient sans bien se connaître, frais-ensorcelés par la découverte des terres neuves où bâtir le meilleur des demains' (p. 43). The thirst for gold of the Spanish Crown that led to the expropriation of the Amerindians is echoed in Ésabelle's passion for gold jewellery: 'Ésabelle, qui convoitait passionnément cet or-sans-forcer...' (p. 45). As for Columbus' thirst for territorial conquests, in accordance with the conventional parallel between land and the female body, it becomes Christophe's drive for sexual conquests: no sooner has he seduced Ésabelle, than he sets his eyes on another woman 'Il la baptisait déjà Santa Maria...' (p. 47). Thus the text undermines the glorification of Spanish chronicles, and the Conquest of America is now denounced as a brutal colonial enterprise. In this new version of facts, history is deflated and

disappears behind the story. The same tactic is used in another instance, in the aforementioned episode of Félix Éboué. After she once walked past a group of young men hiding behind a newspaper with the headline 'Un Noir 100 pour cent pour la première fois nommé gouverneur des Colonies', Éliette's shyness is mistaken for pretentiousness: she is thought to believe only a man like Félix Éboué is worthy of her and consequently nicknamed '100 pour cent'. The news of Félix Éboué's appointment is completely ignored by the young men: to them, the fact is of little significance. It is Éliette who retains their attention, and the governor himself is only envisaged as a potential rival. Again the historic cedes prominence to the anecdotal, reflecting Pineau's preference for the story over the chronicle.

The introduction of the gender dimension also confers on women's versions of history their own particularities. 'Even a superficial examination of the Caribbean points to the multiple ways in which a discourse of sexuality is imbricated in that of history', remarks Susan Andrade ('The Nigger of the Narcissist', p. 214). Marqués and Glissant's conception of colonisation as emasculation, as well as the male writers' systematic feminisation of the Caribbean examined in the previous chapter, both confirm this view. According to Andrade, in Condé's *Heremakhonon* 'the obsession with history and sexuality solicits a psychoanalytic interpretation of the two as naturally overlapping' (p. 216). This claim is particularly appropriate to *L'Espérance-macadam*, where history is connected to sexuality (or sexual violence) through, once more, the metaphor of the hurricane. Both Éliette's and Angela's rapists are compared to hurricanes: 'Cyclone... Combien de fois s'était-il [Rosan] jeté pis qu'un cyclone sur le corps d'Angela' (p. 252). Éliette's father is likewise constantly referred to as the 1928 hurricane after the rape. In the mind of the mother Séraphine, who goes mad after the tragic episode, just as for Éliette's aunt Anoncia, who had prophetically nicknamed her brother 'Ti-Cyclone' as a child, Éliette's father becomes the hurricane, 'la Bête'. The association between history and rape is a leitmotiv of Caribbean postcolonial writing: many counter-histories have qualified the colonisation process as a rape of the islands together with their indigenous inhabitants, and subsequently the transplanted populations. The novelty in Pineau's version is that the rapist is not the coloniser, but the colonised male. She thereby denounces the ongoing exploitation of Caribbean women.<sup>32</sup> Like Fanon in *Les*

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<sup>32</sup> This aspect of the violence of the colonised is further examined in chapter four.

*Damnés de la Terre*,<sup>33</sup> Pineau points out that it was not enough to give the local intelligentsia access to power: the whole system needs restructuring, if real change is to take place. And such restructuring cannot leave out women.

Perhaps because they share with the French Antilleans a sense of historical insignificance, Puerto Rican writers have also felt that they were in a state of *non histoire* and had a similar approach in their historiographic enterprise. Since their past can only be conceived as glorious if invented, several Puerto Rican writers have drawn on their poetic imagination to forge their own version of history, which re-inscribes the Puerto Ricans (as Luis López Nieves does in *Seva*, 1983, or Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá in *La noche oscura del Niño Avilés*, 1984). But here again, the role of Puerto Rican women, as well as, sometimes, that of the common people, is largely obliterated from these male-centred versions.

Mayra Santos's project is similar to Zavala's in its endeavour to re-inscribe the common people, including Afro-Puerto Ricans and women, in the historiography of the island. In the section 'Un pasado posible' added to the second edition of *Pez de vidrio* in 1996, history is deflated, as if to signify that historic deeds are no more important than daily historical actions. Thus the story 'La oreja de Van Gogh' offers a sarcastic portrayal of a male protagonist obsessed with the glorious past, particularly that of Europe, and frustrated by Puerto Rico's insignificance: in his view the island can only produce materialistic, narrow-minded people, no genius of Van Gogh's standard. With 'Hombre de ciencia' Santos operates a reversal, rewriting the Spanish Conquest from the viewpoint of the Amerindians, who see the invaders as barely human, ignorant brutes.

Yet it is perhaps in a story from the first section of the collection where Santos most successfully re-writes history. In 'Dilcia M.', Santos proceeds to re-inscribe Puerto Rican women in the nationalist struggle. Serving an endless sentence since her teenage years for her political activities, US-born Dilcia has been turned into a heroine praised in the patriotic press: 'ella era aquella tipa tan valiente que decía todas esas cosas sin duda alguna y que juraba que iba derecho a su panteón primero que renegar de la causa y que seguía llamando al enemigo "enemigo" y asegurándole al pueblo (¿cuál?) que ella estaba bien y que asumía las consecuencias

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<sup>33</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre*, Paris: François Maspéro, 1961.

de su acto de sacrificio, que es en sí un acto de amor' (*Pez de vidrio*, p. 55). Her involvement in the armed struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico is described in the story: 'ella se tiró a aprender a disparar y a hacer un piso falso y a guardar y transportar las M-16, las 38 y 45 calientes' (p. 54).

Yet the focus is not so much on the image that Dilcia projects to the public than on the Dilcia who is left alone in her cell, and who has come to question everything, starting with the very concept of time. The story opens with the sentence: 'Todo el día metida en esa celda, ya se había olvidado de dónde empezaba el día' (p. 53). Dilcia has lost track of time: in her mind, her memories are conflated with her present situation. This could of course be ascribed to her twelve years' imprisonment; but what is interesting here is that by denying the passage of time, Dilcia is also undermining the very notion of history.

Furthermore, in her cell Dilcia begins to question the meaning of her political commitment, whose cause is now reduced to a mere word that remains unsaid in the story: 'aquella palabra que de vez en cuando pierde su sentido – la palabra por la cual ella se tiró a aprender a disparar...' (p. 54). She wonders what is the point of her sacrifice, of having given her youth away for an ideal that seems divorced from any reality. Even the validity of the autonomous struggle is questioned: as indicated by the insertion of the word '¿cuál?' (which one?) in brackets in the first quote given above, Dilcia now realises that she is not even sure which people she was really fighting for. The question could be interpreted as a sarcastic remark on the author's part that, unlike some of their radical brothers on the mainland, most of the Puerto Ricans in the island are in fact quite happy with the political status quo: so that the people for which Dilcia and her comrades are fighting do not actually exist.

What is most questioned in the story, however, is the very heroic status that Dilcia has acquired among her fellow political activists. Dilcia has been petrified by myth: her supporters still imagine her as the teenage girl she was previous to her imprisonment, twelve years before. Such a mystification denies the very transformation of Dilcia's body through time: still more, it denies her existence. This is clear when, informed that she has a visitor, Dilcia gets up and reflects on the existence of her legs: '¿Es en el piso donde comienzan sus piernas?' (p. 54). As she mentally prepares what she will say to her visitor, Dilcia clearly loses her sense of self. Thus her body disappears behind the myth, and so do her feelings and thoughts; she utters the words she knows are expected from her: 'las palabras que se había



aprendido de memoria para esas ocasiones' (p. 54). So not only does Dilcia lose her freedom to the myth, for she is to stay in prison so as to become a martyr of the Puerto Rican independence movement in the US, but she also loses her body, her mind, and her sense of self.

Santos, however, rescues her protagonist from the erasure brought about by this process of mystification by insisting on her reality in the cell. The character loses its mythical status: for instance, where her supporters see the photograph of a romantic heroine, Dilcia notices that she was wearing too much eye make-up on that day. Similarly, after reading the praise she receives in the article, she cannot help reflecting to herself: 'pendeja' (p. 55). The emphasis on Dilcia's body, and in particular her sexual desire, is another way in which Santos resists the mystification of her protagonist. There is also in the text an insistence on the difference between the teenage and the adult Dilcia. In fact, a sort of schizophrenia occurs, as evidenced in the very first quote given above: '*ella era aquella* tipa valiente....' (p. 55). To the extent that as she looks at the picture of herself at seventeen, Dilcia thinks of it as 'her double': 'el rostro doble, el de ella, el de la foto' (p. 54). Towards the end of the story, the gap between the mythical and the 'real' Dilcia increases, as the protagonist begins to wonder whether anyone outside thinks of her otherwise than as a patriotic martyr: 'Seguramente había alguien que estaba triste preguntándose por ella y su forma de sobrevivir' (p. 56). So whereas the story begins with almost a denial of time and historicity, here on the contrary there is an insistence on the time that has elapsed, and a recognition that the twenty-nine year-old Dilcia is no longer the same person as the seventeen year-old girl. In particular, her commitment to the cause has changed: the mature Dilcia is now questioning the dogma of patriotism, and at the close of the story she is on the verge of surrendering: 'Afuera hay alguien que la imagina y que tal vez entienda que ella necesita salir de ahí ahora, antes de convertirse en una traidora porque ya se le está olvidando hasta aparentar' (p. 56).

Santos thus withdraws her protagonist from the Medusa of History, underlining that change, evolution, is part of life: only what is dead is fixed. She thereby points to the fact that myths and legends function precisely to fix things, so as to provide easy, clear-cut explanations that overlook the complexity and multiplicity of truth. Heroic figures, for instance, seem never torn by doubt, yet all individuals are. Santos's was not the first story by a woman writer to challenge René Marqués's misogynous assertions regarding the involvement of Puerto Rican women in the

nationalist struggle. As mentioned above, García Ramis deals with the same issue in 'Una semana de siete días'. Significantly, her protagonist, who reaches a mythical status in her daughter's eyes, disappears at the end of the story. So it seems that the very process of mystification entails the disappearance of the individual, a point taken up later in relation to Álvarez. It is precisely because unlike García Ramis she resists such mystification that in her story Santos is more successful in re-inscribing women in Puerto Rican historiography.

Unlike the French Caribbean and Puerto Rico, Haiti is not proscribed to a state of *non histoire*. Yet Danticat shares with Pineau the belief that historical accounts should not simply amount to a focus on heroic figures and battles, but render the lives of ordinary people too. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is by no means a historical novel, yet it is deeply rooted in Haiti's past and present. This novel exposes the daily plight of the average man or woman and narrates a family story, thereby rescuing from oblivion the past (and present) of over ninety per cent of Haitians. Danticat's approach shares most of the features examined in Pineau. In particular, she conceives history as cyclical and approaches it from an intimist angle. It is mostly through the use of matrilinear genealogy that Danticat achieves the re-inscription of women in the Caribbean past.

Via its focus on Sophie's family and contemporary events, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* constantly refers to a near or more distant past. Although historical references are rarely explicit, the past is brought to life through names. Many characters bear names with a historical resonance. The significance of naming in the novel is stressed in the episode when Sophie is taken to the airport: 'There is always some trouble here. [...] They are changing the name of the airport from François Duvalier to Maïs Gaté, like it was before François Duvalier was president' (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, p. 33). Here the act of renaming amounts to a political statement: it clearly indicates a demarcation from Papa Doc's line. Sophie's surname, Caco, which she significantly inherits from her mother, has a strong political and historical resonance too. The *cacos*, peasants who played a major role at several points in Haitian history, have become a symbol of popular dissent. The choice of this surname for protagonists from a rural background is thus a tribute to Haitian peasantry, to their resilience and resistance, and the novel makes several allusions to the strength of Caco women in particular. This is reinforced by Sophie's

grandfather's full name, Charlemagne Le Grand Caco, which brings to mind the 'great *caco*' Charlemagne Péralte, who led the 1918 uprising against the US occupation.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as examined in the previous chapter, there is no idealisation of the peasant world in Danticat: in this respect her approach contrasts with that of many of her compatriots, for instance Jacques Roumain. Another significant name is that of the coalman Dessalines, evocative of Haiti's revolutionary past. But by contrast with these heroes, the grandfather drops dead in a canefield, and the coalman is murdered by the *tontons macoutes*, both victims of economic exploitation and political repression and utterly incapable of revolt. What the novel suggests here is that neo-colonialism and Duvalierism have crushed the revolutionary spirit of the people and reduced them to silence and submission.

By inscribing these glorious names into the genealogies of ordinary Haitians, Danticat stresses that these heroes were ordinary Haitians too. She thus recuperates the history of the masses. Indeed, that this history should be evoked through collective memory, and more particularly family memory, passed on through storytelling – hence the importance of orality in the novel – further underlines that history, whether in its making or recording, is a collective process, rather than the prerogative of a few exceptional individuals. But the scope of Danticat's historical project is wider, since Sophie's remembrance of the Caco women also re-inserts the female presence in Haitian history, suggesting in particular that, although they are not mentioned in history books and probably did not take part in the armed struggle, through their support and actions on the home front the female companions of the *cacos* – just like the Caribbean women recalled by Condé in *La parole des femmes* – played an equally important role in the rebellion. Here again, the author's primary interest does not lie with official historiography, but with an imagined history that is probably closer to actual facts than the mystified accounts found in official historiographies.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The *cacos* were small landowning peasants, representing the rural middle-class, who throughout Haitian history have intervened sporadically in the historical, social and political development of the country by revolting. Their rebellion starting in August 1911 brought about the fall of President Antoine Simon and destabilised the subsequent governments for four years. This political instability ultimately motivated the US occupation of 1915. The *cacos* rose against the occupiers in 1918.

<sup>35</sup> In *From Dessalines to Duvalier* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), David Nicholls shows how the continuing rivalry between the black and mulatto elites has led them to elaborate two conflicting historiographies of Haiti, each faction glorifying its own leaders while minimising the contribution of the leaders of the other caste. A mulatto and a *noiriste* legend thus emerged.

Carolyn Duffey shows how Haitian women have been obliterated from traditional historiographies.<sup>36</sup> In particular, while they appear in Thomas Madhiou's history of Haiti, two historic female figures, the legendary Défilé, who joined Dessalines' troops during the Independence War, and Soeur Rose, were subsequently written out of official history books. Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* aims to recuperate these two figures. Soeur Rose is inscribed in the name of the town, Ville Rose, around which the whole collection revolves, while in the story 'Nineteen Thirty Seven', Défilé is the narrator's ancestor.<sup>37</sup>

'Nineteen Thirty Seven' takes its title from the massacre of ten to forty thousand Haitian cane-cutters working in the Dominican Republic by the dictator Trujillo. Here as in Pineau, though, the private story takes precedence over history: on 1 November 1937, during the massacre, the narrator's grandmother was killed and the narrator (Josephine) was born, prematurely induced by her mother's flight from the butchery. So history is personalised and told from the point of view of the anonymous masses. The women whose mothers were murdered on the day of the massacre gather for a yearly pilgrimage to the Massacre River; the Haitian women's presence among the cane-cutters is thus reasserted. The pilgrimages also stress the need for female solidarity and generational continuity from mother to daughter. These pilgrimages held in honour of the attendants' mothers connect them to each other and to their past: 'we were all daughters of that river', Josephine reflects (*Krik? Krak!*, p. 41). And another survivor, Jacqueline, tells her: 'I am a child of that place [the river]. I come from that long trail of blood' (p. 44). Furthermore, these ceremonies are presided by a statue of the Madonna, passed on from mother to daughter and which the protagonist's mother has inherited from her ancestor Défilé. The statue is thus a symbol of resistance, and Défilé is envisaged as an archetypal mother who provides emotional support and incites her descendants, the Haitian women, to dissent. However, no mention is made of the heroic role played by Défilé in the story; instead, there is only an allusion to her slavery past. Rather than being singled out as an exceptional figure, Défilé is therefore simply presented as a

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<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed study of this aspect, see Carolyn Duffey's 'In Flight from the Borderlines: Roses, Rivers and Missing Haitian History in Marie Chauvet's *Colère* and Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* and *The Farming of Bones*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Special Issue, 'The Caribbean That Isn't: Rifts and Disjunctions', vol 3, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 156-170.

<sup>37</sup> Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* New York: Soho Press, 1994. This edition London: Abacus, 1996.

courageous slave woman, like there were many others. Once again, there is no glorification of heroism, but a recognition of the importance of the resistance of ordinary Haitians in the past as in the present. It is precisely because she is not perceived as exceptional by her descendants that Défilé can sustain them in their resistance.

Here as in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the female genealogy is re-asserted. In the novel, however, the re-insertion of Sophie within a female genealogy was limited, for although she inherited her family name from her mother, Martine had in turn inherited it from her father. So despite Sophie's vivid recollection (and imagination) of the women of the Caco family, like in any conventional genealogy, where the stress is on a surname generally passed on from fathers to sons, the female line (that of Sophie's maternal grandmother, who would not be Caco women, as opposed to her maternal grandfather's) is obliterated. By contrast, in 'Nineteen Thirty Seven', family names are irrelevant, and, as will be discussed shortly, what counts is the spirit of resilience drawn from the comforting memory of Défilé and passed on from mother to daughter: Danticat is thus more successful in re-appraising female genealogy.

Yet Danticat shows in her story that, just as Haitian women have been erased from official historiography, the ruling power as well as the common people are determined to consign these dissident women and their experience to oblivion. The women who have survived the 1937 Massacre, as well as other brave women, are literally persecuted under the pretext that they are *djablettes*, or witches. Thus Josephine's mother is arrested because her miraculous survival from the massacre convinced people that she holds maleficent supernatural powers. When Josephine goes to visit her in prison, she reflects on her mother's inmates: 'All of these women were here for the same reason. They were said to have been seen at night rising from the ground like birds on fire. A loved one, a friend, or a neighbor had accused them of causing the death of a child. A few other people agreeing with these stories was all that was needed to have them arrested. And sometimes even killed' (p. 38). So, although the Massacre was engineered by the Dominicans, most of the violence alluded to in the story is in fact perpetrated by Haitians, even the common people. And it is always exerted against women.

Women such as the Massacre survivors are thus systematically eliminated, as if, the text suggests, Haitian society disapproved of female resistance and dissidence.

To the common people, it seems that the courage of such women is too daunting, and punishing them is an easy way to silence their own remorse for their utter compliance. For the authorities, these women must be eliminated because of the threat they pose to the iniquitous order newly instated (the story is set in the years immediately prior to, or just after, Duvalier's access to power). Indeed, the text explicitly states at one point that what is coded as sorcery (the belief that the women of the river have supernatural powers and can fly) is in fact quite simply courage and resilience: 'my mother's dive toward life – her swim among all those bodies slaughtered in flight – gave her those wings of flame. The river was the place where it had all begun' (p. 41).

One of the aims of the story, therefore, is to record the persecution of such women. The text emphasises the slow erasure of Josephine's mother: in prison, she is fading away out of malnutrition and mistreatment, to the extent that her daughter refers to her as a ghost. On each visit her daughter notes the further erosion of her body: 'My mother had grown even thinner since the last time I had seen her. Her face looked like the gray of a late evening sky. These days, her skin barely clung to her bones, falling in layers, flaps, on her face and neck' (p. 36). And further on: 'Her voice was hoarse from lack of use. With every visit, it seemed to get worse and worse. I was afraid that one day, like me, she would not be able to say anything at all' (p. 37). At the end of the story, the mother is killed (beaten to death by the guards) and her body is cremated. All Josephine is left with is her mother's pillow, which is filled with her hair, the statue and her memory. The cremation is of course designed to prevent the mother from turning into a powerful martyr. It also serves another purpose: in the Caribbean, honouring one's dead by regularly visiting their graves is crucial to ensure continuity from one generation to the next. By cremating the body and leaving no grave to honour, the authorities not only prevent the mother from retaining her supernatural powers, as the prison guards naively believe; most of all, they attempt to sever her link to Josephine, to put an end to the family memory, and so to destroy the seed of dissent.

That Josephine's mother's voice should be slowly fading away further underlines how women's version of history is being silenced in Haiti, erased from history books and collective memory. In a country where illiteracy rates remain high, the oral transmission of the past is still crucial to the elaboration of a collective memory, where a history of great deeds, together with one of abuse and exploitation,

is engraved. Josephine's absolute mutism on each visit to her mother is disturbing, for it suggests that the authorities have indeed succeeded in silencing the mother forever, and in smothering her spirit of dissent and resilience by silencing the daughter too. In addition, initially Josephine seems to believe the accusation that her mother is a witch: when she finally speaks on her last visit, it is to ask her mother whether she could really fly. She herself perceives her question as an 'implied accusation' (p. 43). Josephine's own doubts about her mother, which may shed light on her silence in her presence, demonstrate the power of ignorance, which leads public opinion to condemn these courageous women.

Yet because Josephine's mutism is only occasional (during the visits), and most of all because it is Josephine herself who tells (or writes down) her mother's story, it can be maintained that, on the contrary, the authorities ultimately failed in their enterprise of silencing the voices of Défilé and Josephine's mother. Indeed, when Josephine asks Jacqueline again whether her now late mother could fly, she suddenly remembers the story as her mother had told it to her. She comes to understand that her mother was only condemned for her courage. But if the authorities fail to extinguish Défilé's female genealogy, it is mostly because, unlike male-centred, conventional genealogies, it does not rely purely on a surname or even on blood. By the end of the story, it becomes clear that Jacqueline will substitute for Josephine's dead mother, just as Josephine herself had substituted for her grandmother in relation to her mother. Jacqueline tells Josephine: 'Sister, life is never lost, another one always comes up to replace the last', and Josephine comments: 'When Jacqueline took my hand, her fingers felt balmy and warm against the lifelines in my palm' (p. 48). So the female genealogy recuperated in this story – and with it the dissident voices of Haitian women – cannot come to an end, for it is one passed on among women through solidarity in grief and resistance. This enlarged conception of matrilineage is the same one found in Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent*, where Télumée, although she never bears a child, nonetheless attempts to hand down the capacity of resilience she inherited from Toussine to her adoptive daughter Sonore. It is also the conception of matrilineage found in Condé's *Moi Tituba*, where the protagonist, who dies childless, still manages to pass on her spirit of resistance to her chosen daughter Samantha. Above all, such a conception of genealogy goes against the obsession with the paternal line that underlies not only conventional Western historiography, but also much of the Caribbean (male) literary

imagination, which, as Sam Haigh shows in relation to the Francophone area, is obsessed with the theme of *bâtardise* and the quest for legitimacy through the paternal line, an obsession that relates to an atavistic conception of history.<sup>38</sup>

While Haitian history books have disposed of Défilé and Soeur Rose, across the border three female historic figures, the Mirabal sisters, are recorded and remembered. They are, however, canonised at home but little known abroad. Julia Álvarez has set herself the task of making them known to the world. In a move that may appear paradoxical, she achieves her aim by eroding the myths surrounding the sisters, to make them emerge as full-fleshed, historical characters.

Three of the four Mirabal sisters were involved in the underground resistance movement against Trujillo and murdered by the dictator in 1960. They have become martyrs of the Dominican Republic. Yet Julia Álvarez resists the temptation to enhance their legendary status in *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994). In the opening of the novel, official historiography is pictured as a myth-making industry that commodifies memory: 'Before she knows it, she is setting up her life as if it were an exhibit labeled neatly for those who can read: THE SISTER WHO SURVIVED', reflects Dedé (p. 5). Under the gaze of the Medusa, her own sisters, turned into the mythical Butterflies, have become strangers to Dedé. In her postscript, Álvarez points out to the dangers of petrifying historical figures into myths, because this is ultimately paralysing and counterproductive: 'I realized that such deification was dangerous, the same god-making impulse that had created our tyrant. And ironically, by making them myth, we lost the Mirabals once more, dismissing the challenge of their courage as impossible for us, ordinary men and women' (p. 324). Dedé is fully aware of the petrifying nature of mystification: '[She was] used to this fixed, monolithic language around interviewers and mythologizers of her sisters' (p. 7). To 'this fixed, monolithic language' Dedé opposes her own stories. What she tells her nieces and nephews about their mothers is quite different from what she tells interviewers: 'she wants them to know the living breathing women their mothers were. They get enough of the heroines from everyone else' (p. 64). Once more, the

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<sup>38</sup> See *Mapping a Tradition*, pp. 92-101. In 'La littérature antillaise d'expression française' (*Présence Africaine* 120-121, 1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>ème</sup> trimestres 1982, pp. 130-34), Roger Toumson likewise notes an obsession with the name in Caribbean societies. Surprisingly, though, he relates it to an obsession with the mother, and not the father: 'La fixation au "nom" est fixation à la mère' (p. 134).



emphasis is on unofficial accounts of the past handed down – more often than not orally – from one generation to the next, rather than on conventional historiography.

Conventional historiography – be it in connection with the mythologisation of the Butterflies or the distorsion of facts under the dictatorship – is indeed undermined throughout the novel. Thus young Minerva denounces the falsification at work during the celebration of the centenary of Dominican independence (1944):

It was our country's centennial year. We'd been having celebrations and performances ever since Independence Day on February 27<sup>th</sup>. [My family had] to give some sort of patriotic affair to show their support of Trujillo. It wasn't just my family putting on a big loyalty performance, but the whole country. When we got to school that fall, we were issued new history textbooks with a picture of you-know-who embossed on the cover so even a blind person could tell who the lies were all about. Our history now followed the plot of the Bible. We Dominicans had been waiting for centuries for the arrival of our Lord Trujillo on the scene. It was pretty disgusting (p. 24).

The text thus points to the re-writing of history that took place under the *trujillato*. Minerva's own contribution to the centennial is a play that she is to perform with her friends Sinita, Elsa and Lourdes for the dictator:

We had written our own lines instead of just reciting things from a book. That way we could say what we wanted instead of what the censors said we could say. Not that we were stupid enough to say anything bad about the government. Our skit was set way back in the olden days. I played the part of the enslaved Motherland, tied up during the whole performance until the very end when Liberty, Glory, and the narrator untied me. This was supposed to remind the audience of our winning our independence a hundred years ago (p. 25).

Minerva and her friends' play is thus truly an act of re-writing a falsified history. In the light of the tradition of historical revisions in the Dominican Republic, Álvarez's distrust of the official myths on the Butterflies thus appears motivated not only by the counterproductive effect of such myths, but also, just as crucially, by the fact that such myth-making is particularly symptomatic of totalitarian regimes. The performance itself becomes an act of history-making, of overt protest, when the girl in the part of Liberty, Sinita – whose five uncles, father, and brother were all murdered by the dictator – modifies the ending of the play, defiantly aiming at the dictator with her toy bow, whereas she was supposed to untie the Motherland.

Instead of traditional historiography, Álvarez turns more readily to the *testimonio*. This genre, very common in the Americas, is particularly associated with the voice of the subaltern. According the convention of the genre, the writing process, or more specifically the task of collecting information from the witness, is

described within the novel: the author figures in the text as an inquisitive *gringa dominicana* who has come to interview the survivor, Dedé. Yet even this genre is diverted and subverted by the author. The *testimonio* is usually chiefly concerned, obviously, with the survivors: typically, a character tells his or her own life story, which is not exceptional, but taken to exemplify the life of a whole community. Here, only a quarter of the novel is dedicated to Dedé; the rest focuses on the sisters who died.

Furthermore, the myths surrounding the Butterflies, and thereby the very legitimacy of official historiography as well as *testimonios*, are questioned when the text stresses the unreliability of memory, and in particular in the version of facts Dedé gives the interviewer-narrator-author: 'Nonsense, so much nonsense the memory cooks up, mixing up facts, putting in a little of this and a little of that' (p. 72). Similarly, when years after the performance for the Centenary, Elsa provides her own version of the event, in which it is Minerva who aims at Trujillo with a bow, Minerva ponders: 'I wondered which of us had revised the past to suit the lives we were living now' (p. 264).

Since testimonies are unreliable, Álvarez proposes fiction as a basis from which to reconstitute the past. She thus blurs the borderline between fiction and reality, and the use of the *testimonio* enhances the fusion between the two. The introduction of the interviewing process within the text makes the Mirabal sisters all the more real, since it puts the author on the same level as the characters. The repeated switches back and forth between past and present (1994) further contribute to the fusion of story and history. By thus referring to the conventions of the *testimonio* – where the author makes explicit and gives evidence of the historicity of the narrator at the origin of the written text – only to then subvert them, Álvarez seems to be debunking historical reliability. This is especially evident in chapter eleven, where Mate's diary, which forms the basis of her testimony throughout the novel, is shown to have been altered to circumvent censorship: pages were torn out, in some passages, all names have been blocked out, etc. Mate's inclusion of a historical document (a newspaper extract) in her diary further enhances the tenuousness of the borderline between fact and fiction. Besides increasing the confusion between historical sources and artistic creation in the mind of the reader, this device stresses that fiction can be closer to facts than historical accounts. Indeed, the newspaper article, dated 30 June 1961, was written by a close associate of Trujillo's to deny the

charges brought by the international community regarding the violation of human rights. The text thus implies that it is not possible to recover the truth, since the true witnesses of history have all died, and the survivors, intentionally or not, always distort the truth. This echoes Walcott's statement regarding the slave's amnesia and his contention that 'The Sea is History'.

Yet the sisters' testimonies, if they defy the conventions of the genre, prove to be more fruitful accounts of the past than the official mythologisation around them. The murdered sisters escape the Medusa of History owing to Álvarez's vivid characterisation. In Álvarez's account, via the evocation of Dedé's memory, the Butterflies cease to be museum objects to regain their status as living subjects. As for Dedé, she is portrayed as a modern woman, a character who resists being fixed in the past and is instead inscribed in the present. Her chief responsibility in the 1990s is not so much to 'be the grande dame of the beautiful, terrible past' as to 'manage the terrible, beautiful present' (p. 65). In particular, it is hinted that, just like Dedé, two of the Butterflies would have divorced, although they were in all appearances happily married. Significantly, the novel is first and foremost dedicated not to the martyred Butterflies, but to the survivor Dédé. There is thus a binary opposition between what is fixed and what is changing, the dead and the living, the definitive and the temporary or relative, the heroic and the ordinary. So Álvarez clearly understands history as Relation, in Glissant's triple acceptation of the term as what is related (Dédé's stories), what is relative (put into perspective), as well as what is linked.

Indeed, the multiplication of points of view prevents a straightforward, unidimensional depiction of the protagonists. Each sister gets her own voice in the text, each of which evolves as events shape their understanding of the situation and their political consciousness. The sisters' intimate knowledge of each other, as well as sibling rivalries provide contradictory accounts which act as a foil to the immaculate heroines that emerge from traditional historiographies. Here unlike in Pineau, heroism is not debunked but, more like what Danticat does with Défilé, heroic figures lose their sacred aura. This is especially true of Patria, held in the island as an icon of religiosity and motherhood, and whose symbolic name further serves to designate her as a paragon of the traditional Dominican woman. She emerges from the novel as a woman full of sensuality, and whose faith is not as firm as legend may have it. The same is true of Minerva, who reflects close to the end:

My months in prison had elevated me to a superhuman status. It would hardly have been seemly for someone who had challenged our dictator to suddenly succumb to a nervous attack at the communion rail.

I hid my anxieties and gave everyone a bright smile. If they had only known how frail was their iron-will heroine. How much it took to put on that hardest of all performances, being my old self again (p. 259).

Like Santos's Dilcia, Minerva has come to question the basis of heroism. And so has Dedé. Although she is in charge of the museum dedicated to the Butterflies, Dedé privately mocks the mythologisation of her sisters. She recalls the words of the interviewer with sarcasm: 'these unsung heroines of the underground, *et cetera*' (p. 3, emphasis added).

The same desacralisation process occurs for Trujillo, whose depiction is perhaps Álvarez's best achievement, for it resists the temptation of either demonising or deifying the dictator. Thus the same Patria who in 1959 joined the underground movement thought of him in 1946: 'El Jefe is no saint, everyone knew that, but among the *bandidos* that had been in the National Palace, this one at least was building churches and schools, paying off our debts' (p. 51). By providing multiple points of view on Trujillo (from both his opponents and his supporters, as well as from the largely illiterate, pauperised majority of Dominicans, demonstrating little interest in politics), the text ensures that the dictator is not mythologised. Instead, it engages the responsibility of every Dominican in the political outcome of the country: 'This regime is seductive. How else would a whole nation fall prey to this little man?', Minerva wonders (p. 96). Later on it is Patria who reflects: 'I don't know, I wanted to start believing in my fellow Dominicans again. Once the goat [Trujillo] was a bad memory in our past, that would be the real revolution we would have to fight: forgiving each other for what we had all let come to pass' (p. 222).

Álvarez's account of the Mirabals' struggle is imbued with the feminine. For instance, in accordance with a pattern described by Nancy Chodorow<sup>39</sup>, the personal growth of Álvarez's Butterflies characteristically takes place in relation to those around them. More specifically, each of the sisters' political awakening – like that of their friends Hilda, Sinita, Elsa, Lourdes, also involved in some way or other in the resistance against Trujillo – is linked to a major event in their life (starting to

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<sup>39</sup> *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

menstruate, finding true love, giving birth to a still-born child). It is clear in the novel that their decision to get involved in the underground is motivated by their connections with others: initially her best friend Sinita and later her father for Minerva; first her sister Minerva and then her husband for Mate; her son for Patria; so that their political engagement is presented more in terms of a personal reaction to a situation than as an adherence to ideologies (although Minerva's commitment is certainly much more politicised than her sisters').

There is thus a tendency to understand politics in domestic terms in the novel. While a great deal of attention is placed on the details of the sisters' decision to become involved, little space is devoted to the Butterflies' underground actions. The bulk of the text focuses instead on their daily lives, with their crises, joys and pains, providing the other facet of these Dominican icons. When the text engages with history as it is conventionally understood, it does so again in the feminine mode. The chapters focusing on Patria are a particularly good example of the way Álvarez suffuses political involvement with a language specifically female, that of a mother: 'So it was that our house became the mother house of the movement. [...] It was on this very Formica table where you could still see the egg stains from my family's breakfast that the bombs were made. [...] It was on that very rocker where I had nursed every one of my babies that I saw my sister Minerva looking through the viewfinder of an M-I carbine...' (pp.166-67).

There is indeed a particular concern for the plight of women under the *trujillato* in the novel: while the text portrays the extreme poverty and social injustice of the 1960s Dominican Republic, it is particularly emphatic on the high illiteracy rate, and on the lack of prospects for women, two conditions that certainly contributed to the longevity of the dictatorship. Thus, even Reyes de Mirabal, the mother, cannot read; she only learns at a late stage, thanks to Mate who teaches her. The systematic exclusion from nation-building is captured in the motto that Minerva reads in Trujillo's office: 'MY BEST FRIENDS ARE MEN WHO WORK', upon which she reflects: 'What about the women who sleep with you?' (p. 113). Instances of this *machista* assumption that nation-building is solely a men's business recur in the novel, while it is challenged by the text itself. Patria thus reports how on the revelation that his mother has been keeping him away from political activism her son protested: 'It was unfair, I wasn't letting him become a man' (p. 158).

Minerva is extremely vociferous on the oppression of women in Dominican society. Before being sent to school she feels trapped at home: 'The four of us had to ask permission for everything [...] Sometimes, watching the rabbits in their pens, I'd think, I'm not so different from you, poor things' (p. 11). Later on, once gaining political awareness at school, she draws a parallel between her family and the Dominican Republic at large: 'I'd just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country' (p. 13). She believes women have to join the fight against the oppressor, so as 'to come out of the dark ages' (p. 51). On the personal level, she sees her ambitions to become a lawyer frustrated first by her father's refusal to send her to university, and later by the dictator's refusal to grant her a licence to open a legal practice after graduation. Numerous analogies between Trujillo and the Butterflies' father imply that most Dominican men behave as tyrants towards women. That Dominican women, especially those from the upper classes, should have felt particularly vulnerable at the time is evidenced by the insistence on the dictator's own treatment of women in the text. The novel recounts the story of Lina, a young girl from a well-to-do family seduced by the dictator, only to be abandoned after a few months, pregnant, and sent away to Miami. Later, Trujillo sets his sights on Minerva herself.

So in her book not only does Álvarez pay homage to heroines of Dominican history, but she also acknowledges the courage and the resistance, that is, their contribution to the building of the nation, of all Dominican women. *In the Time of the Butterflies* replaces petrifying myths by complex but living testimonies, thus ensuring that the spirit of the Butterflies lives on.

The authors examined above are among the numerous women writers to have engaged in a re-evaluation of women's contribution to the emergence of Caribbean nations. Not only do they re-inscribe women in Caribbean historiographies, but, perhaps more importantly, they challenge the notion that history can be reduced to the accomplishment of exceptional characters. They show the other facet of History: the history of the ordinary Caribbean people, and in particular women. Many male writers, especially in the (neo)colonial French Caribbean and Puerto Rico, focus on recuperating the side of history that has fallen to oblivion – that of the vanquished,

often that of the slaves – by recounting the glorious episodes of the Caribbean past.<sup>40</sup> This leads them to remould colonial historiography, and to produce new versions that all too often focus on periods like the Haitian revolution, and overemphasises the role of Caribbean heroes such as Delgrès, Cudjoe, or the Haitian, Dominican, or Cuban leaders of independence.

The women writers' accounts of the past discussed in the present chapter question the male writers' determination to present new, positive but one-sided pictures of Caribbean societies that overlook less desirable aspects. They more readily adopt an 'oblique gaze on history' (to use Daroquí's phrase) that depicts the trivial, for it is first and foremost daily lives that constitute the basis of the past: what they produce is 'hystory'. Hystory is the story told by the womb, be it Félicia's or Eliette's accounts of the daily collective struggle of Guadeloupe during World War Two; Dilcia's story of her involvement in the Puerto Rican armed struggle, but also her increasing reservations towards notions such as patriotism and nation; the testimony of the resistance of women such as Josephine's mother and the other survivors of the 1937 Massacre of Haitians, passed on through matrilineage; or the versions of underground opposition to the *trujillato* given by women such as the Mirabal sisters, that replace a simplistic manicheism with the revelation of the complexity of this period of the Dominican past.

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<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*, Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966, rpt. by Siglo Veintiuno, Mexico City, 1975), or Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar* (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1986). Despite a focus on the slaves Ti Noel and Esteban Montejo in the first two novels, there remains a strong emphasis on heroism and the historic figures of Mackandal, Boukman, Henry Christophe in Carpentier, and on Baltasar in Rodríguez Juliá.

## 3

### Writing Difference: Linguistic Strategies in Women's Fiction

If women's participation in the elaboration of Caribbean nations has been little acknowledged in mainstream local writing, so has their contribution to the regional cultures. This is particularly patent in the various formulations of discourses around language – the cultural marker *par excellence*, and hence a most appropriate site of inscription of cultural difference – across the archipelago. The first section of this chapter discusses the issues around dominant/dominated language in the diglossic societies of Puerto Rico and the Francophone Caribbean, which, except for Haiti, remain under colonial rule.<sup>1</sup> The second section explores the notion of 'nation language' as a literary response to the linguistic predicament, and reviews various pioneering experiments with this concept in Hispanic and Francophone writing from both monolingual and diglossic societies. The final sections examine how gender affects linguistic practices in recent women's texts, notably in their inscription of cultural difference and depiction of the role of women as cultural producers in these

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<sup>1</sup> According to Marie-Josée Cérol, the linguist C.A. Ferguson was the first to use the term diglossia to designate a specific kind of bilingualism where two languages are not interchangeable but cover complementary spheres of usage, with the ensuing hierarchy based on the difference in social status ('Les enjeux d'une littérature écrite en créole guadeloupéen', in *L'héritage de Caliban*, ed. by Maryse Condé, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-74). In the French Caribbean – and to a large extent in Haiti too – French is the language of the education system, the government, business, and the media, while Creole is reserved for intimate and informal contexts. In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, English only truly dominates business life and part of the media.



areas. While the third section focuses on these issues in a diglossic context (via the examination of the Puerto Rican Mayra Santos and the Guadeloupeans Sylviane Telchid and Gisèle Pineau), the fourth section centres on a monolingual context, Cuba, with the prose of Ana Luz García Calzada.

### Diglossia in Puerto Rico and the Francophone Caribbean

In the Hispanic Caribbean, Spanish remains the only vernacular and, except in Puerto Rico, the sole official language. In comparison with the rest of the region, this zone has experienced limited creolisation.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Antillean variants differ substantially enough from the peninsular linguistic norm and Latin American Spanish for this demarcation to have generated some insecurity among the population, especially among some writers who, predictably, initially pondered over the dilemma of standard versus local Spanish.<sup>3</sup> The same debate arose across the archipelago with regard to British English and hexagonal French. Unlike these territories, however, Cuba and the Dominican Republic – strong with an autonomy achieved progressively but relatively early and with a long, indigenous literary tradition – managed to overcome such a complex by the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, the cession of Puerto Rico to the United States as war booty in 1898 brought to an abrupt halt the progression towards linguistic assurance.

One of the first moves of the new metropole<sup>4</sup> was to institute English as an official language of the island. English thus became ‘a political football’, Lowell

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<sup>2</sup> On Anglophone Caribbean Creoles, see Peter A. Roberts’ *West Indians and Their Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Spanish Creole *palenquero* is confined to small areas of the Hispanic Caribbean. Papiamentu, a Spanish Creole widely spoken in the Netherlands Antilles, is certainly the best integrated and officialised of all Caribbean Creoles. See George Lang’s ‘Islands, Enclaves, Continua: Notes Toward a Comparative History of Caribbean Creole Literatures’ (in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 3, ed. by A. James Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-56).

<sup>3</sup> The somewhat persisting feeling that theirs is a bastardised form of Spanish is recorded in Nicholasa Mohr’s novel *Nilda*, for instance (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). For Puerto Ricans, this is of course amplified by the problematic relationship with English, examined below. ‘Puerto Rican Spanish, with its admixture of indigenous, African, and peasant qualities, is stigmatized to this day [1981] as a corruption of the pure mother tongue and its supposedly more faithful Latin American variants’ Juan Flores notes in ‘“La Carreta Made a U-Turn”: Puerto Rican Language and Culture in the United States’, (p. 164, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1981, reprinted in *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*, Texas: Arte Público Press (University of Houston), 1993, pp. 157-181). In this respect, the relationship Puerto Ricans maintain with English and Spanish is somewhat akin to the linguistic predicament of the Francophone area.

<sup>4</sup> A distinction is made between ‘metropole’ and ‘metropolis’: the first term refers to the colonial mothercountry, while the second refers to a specific city of that country.

Fiet explains, particularly in the educational arena (p. 9).<sup>5</sup> In 1949 Spanish became the sole language of instruction at school, and English a special subject. Yet inadequate and unattractive pedagogy of English accounts for the fact that 'Puerto Rico is still not bilingual'.<sup>6</sup> Language has gradually become an icon for political status in Puerto Rico: in a reductionistic logic, the advocacy for English is interpreted as pro-annexation policy, while efforts to maintain Spanish supremacy are regarded as a step towards autonomy or even independence, and hailed as measures in defence of hispanicity. Indeed, many pro-independence intellectuals have countered US assimilation with hispanophilia, opposing Latin spirituality and refinement to coarse Anglo-Saxon materialism. Ironically, the language and culture of the former colonial masters have thus become the weapons raised to ward off US imperialism.<sup>7</sup> In Puerto Rico, as Frances Negrón-Muntañer signals, this language fetishism has allowed political factions to evade the debate over the island's status: '[they] attempted to consolidate monolithic notions of language and power while avoiding any critique of the intricacies of colonialism'.<sup>8</sup> The terms of the language debate are becoming all the more sterile in that, while remaining profoundly attached to the Spanish language, which they see as an integral part of their identity,

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<sup>5</sup> Introduction to *Rethinking English in Puerto Rico: Exploring the Language Myths and Realities*, ed. by Lowell Fiet, Alicia Pousada and Ada Haiman, Río Piedras: University of Puerto Rico, 1998, pp. 9-14.

<sup>6</sup> Rosymar Peña Ramírez, 'Puerto Rico Needs a New Teaching Policy for English', p. 61, in *Rethinking English in Puerto Rico*, pp. 61-62. See also Barry Nobel and Marilyn McDivitt's 'English Teaching and Bilingual Education in Puerto Rico', *Revista/Review Interamericana* 8: 2 (Summer 1978, San Juan: InterAmerican University Press), pp. 309-315. Even among the university-educated Puerto Ricans that are exclusively island-bred, few are truly proficient in English, so that the teaching in English of most science and social science subjects at university level is an obstacle for many. Among people with less schooling, except again when they have lived on the mainland, the knowledge of English is generally poorer. Nevertheless, unlike their Cuban or Dominican neighbours most Puerto Ricans have at least rudiments of English.

<sup>7</sup> Around the 1930s, some Puerto Rican intellectuals explicitly lamented the end of the Spanish rule: the language and culture they supported, then, were not so much Puerto Rican as peninsular. Today elitist hispanophilia largely explains the contempt and distrust of many island-based Puerto Rican writers towards their mainland counterparts publishing in English, often held to be unsophisticated and hardly educated. Pablo Navarro points out that if hispanophilia is today regarded as conservative, in the 1930s context of the US imposition of English this was quite a liberal position. Nevertheless, these intellectuals' *casticismo*, or defence of a 'pure' language whose norm was invariably peninsular Spanish, was reactionary ('Idioma y educación en Puerto Rico', *Cupez: Revista del Colegio Universitario Metropolitano* 1:1 (January-June 1984), Río Piedras: Universidad de Puerto Rico, pp. 2-7). There were similar cultural responses in contemporaneous Haiti and Dominican Republic, where in the face of US expansionism in the Western hemisphere, Eurocentric elites attempted to demonstrate the superiority of Spanish and French intellectualism over Anglo-Saxon pragmatism. To some extent, such a dichotomy underlies Martí's formulation of his concept of *Nuestra América* too.

<sup>8</sup> 'English Only Jamás but Spanish Only Cuidado', p. 277, in *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism*, ed. by Frances Negrón-Muntañer and Ramón Grosfoguel, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 257-285.

today most Puerto Ricans, even when they are not actually bilingual, increasingly recognise the need to be fluent, or at least proficient, in English.<sup>9</sup>

There are also social and psychological repercussions to the language issue. Although Spanish has never ceased to be an official language in Puerto Rico, there is a feeling among many Puerto Ricans that it is the language of backwardness, while English signifies progress. Writer Ana Lydia Vega comments:

Poco a poco [in the 1950s-1960s] se iba consolidando la visión del inglés como lengua de prestigio, progreso y modernidad. En inglés era todo el vocabulario técnico, científico y literario que incorporábamos para abordar los más diversos aspectos del conocimiento. El español, con su olorcito a mueble antiguo, quedaba reducido a las esferas de lo doméstico y lo íntimo.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the Puerto Rican elite is generally educated in English-speaking private schools and US universities, which has gradually established a hierarchy between the two languages. Yet according to a 1990 census, no more than 40 percent of Puerto Ricans in the island master English relatively well, of which only half can be said to be proficient (*Rethinking English in Puerto Rico*, p. 15).

If the power relationship established between English and Spanish in Puerto Rico was able to spawn an inferiority complex for Spanish speakers, as can be imagined this complex regarding the mother tongue is heightened in the Francophone Caribbean, where, unlike Spanish, Creole cannot rely on a prestigious written tradition. There are in fact broad parallels that can be drawn between the linguistic predicament of the Francophone Caribbean and that of Puerto Rico, insofar as French and English were both colonial languages imposed on the population, while Creole and Puerto Rican Spanish are the mother tongues that emerged from the creolisation process, and as such carry some affectionate value for most of the population.<sup>11</sup> The ensuing diglossic situation also accounts for an uneasy relationship with either or both of the competing languages among most of the

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<sup>9</sup> Sociologists have noted that Puerto Ricans settling in the US tend to retain proficiency in their original mother tongue over more generations than usual immigrant groups, which they regard as a proof of their attachment to Spanish. Yet, although Spanish and English were both proclaimed official languages of Puerto Rico in 1902, the call for a referendum to restore Spanish as the only official language in 1991 by the party of the ELA, the *Partido Popular Democrático*, was a very controversial decision that largely contributed to its electoral defeat in 1992.

<sup>10</sup> 'Pulseando con el difícil', p. 12, in *Esperando a Loló y otros delirios generacionales*, San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994, pp. 11-19 (first published in *Diálogo*, January 1989). The expression 'el difícil' designates the English language.

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Puerto Rican Spanish is of course much closer to the language of the coloniser than French Creole is.

population, as discussed further on. But here end the similarities between Puerto Rico and the Francophone area. That Creole has neither achieved the social status nor been able to rely upon the international recognition enjoyed by Puerto Rican Spanish constitutes a major difference.

The linguistic configuration of Haiti has its own particularities. Until the 1980s, 80 to 90 percent of the population, the small peasantry and urban underclass, were illiterate and spoke no French at all. Since French maintained its status as official language, this meant very reduced social mobility. A similar pattern was found in the early twentieth-century French Caribbean too, as attested by Joseph Zobel's *La Rue cases-nègres*. In other words, independent since 1804, Haiti did not benefit from the late nineteenth-century democratisation in the French educational system that reached its colonies two or three decades later. Until recently, little effort was made to educate the mass of population (whether in Creole or French).<sup>12</sup> The development of the school system from the mid-1980s has improved the situation, but on the whole most Haitians remain primarily Creolophone rather than bilingual. Hoffmann notes that the progress of French in Haiti remains slow, since many literacy programmes are carried out in Creole. In his opinion, because of large-scale emigration to the United States and Anglophone Canada (while earlier upper-class exiles preferred France and Quebec), the role of US protestant missionaries in numerous literacy campaigns, and the growth of tourism, English is progressively displacing French as the second language in Haiti.

The French Caribbean islands are more truly diglossic societies: the majority speak both Creole and French (although actual proficiency in each language may be unequal, the balance varying according to age, class and education). French, the sole official language, enjoys a superior status. On the other hand, its origins in slavery have long stigmatised Creole, which has largely remained an unofficial language, spoken rather than written, used at home but not at school, with a subaltern but not with a superior, and, especially in upper social spheres, judged more appropriate for men than women. Furthermore, Creole used to be connoted with backwardness and intellectual inferiority, while the command of French has always been regarded as a

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<sup>12</sup> The use of French to maintain oligarchy is virulently denounced by Léon-François Hoffmann: '[After independence] administration and commerce became the exclusive preserves of the new *élite*. [...] a minimal part of the national budget was earmarked for education, and [...] French was imposed at all levels, in towns as well as in the countryside, as the only language allowed in schools organized on the metropolitan model' (*Essays on Haitian Literature, op. cit.*, p. 35).

key to collective progress and individual social advancement. Today, however, with the progress of French via the education system between the 1920s and the 1960s, Creole is no longer viewed so negatively. The work of linguists and writers such as Dany Bébel-Gisler, Jean Bernabé, Marie-José Cérol, Raphaël Confiant, Hector Pouillet, and Sylviane Telchid since the 1970s largely contributed to its re-appraisal.

Édouard Glissant's analysis of the linguistic predicament of the French Caribbean in *Le Discours antillais* is unique, in that it relates language (and culture) to the economy and politics. Thus for Glissant, Creole is losing ground to French not simply because of urbanisation and education, but because it has lost its economic and social functions. The decline of the plantation economy and various crafts and small trades in which Creole was the means of communication, in favour of a global, French-speaking, colonial system of production (controlled by the metropole and artificially sustained by subsidies) have rendered Creole superfluous: 'le créole en fait, dans la logique du système, *n'a plus de raison d'être*. [...] Une langue *dans laquelle* on ne fabrique plus rien (si on peut ainsi dire) est une langue menacée. Une langue folklorique' (*Le Discours antillais*, pp. 173-174).

As a result, the younger generations speak a Creole increasingly influenced by French, both lexically and syntactically, a phenomenon Glissant refers to as 'patoisement'.<sup>13</sup> To Glissant, this is alarming. Yet, although he encourages the elaboration of a literary corpus in Creole, he does not think that the gradual officialisation of Creole alone, with the promotion of a set transcription, the elaboration of grammar books, its timid introduction into the school system, and the publication of texts in Creole, would remedy this situation. Indeed, all these measures will remain ineffective as long as the conditions for the decline of Creole (economic dependency and colonial status quo) prevail: 'Soulignons que c'est au moment où le créole est le plus menacé en tant qu'outil social qu'il trouve le plus de défenseurs triomphalistes pour crier sa vitalité [...] Une défense réelle du créole passe par l'élucidation globale des causes de l'agression portée contre elle, non par une pratique folklorique' (p. 174). This explains why despite his nationalist commitment Glissant does not write in Creole, but in a hermetic French that bears the marks of the vernacular. To him, such a hermetism best conveys the socio-

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<sup>13</sup> Most of the young find it difficult to hold a whole informal conversation in Creole without reverting to French. This means that Creole is gradually relegated to the domain of jokes and insults. This, of course, is the fate Puerto Rican language nationalists dread for Spanish.

political predicament of the DOMs, as well as contributing to raising political awareness: 'pour que le créole ait chance de devenir la langue nationale des Martiniquais, il faut au préalable un bouleversement des structures [...] Notre perspective est de nous forger [...] à partir des usages débilisés de deux langues dont le contrôle ne nous fut jamais collectivement acquis, un langage par quoi nous poserions volontairement l'ambigu et enracinerions carrément l'incertain de notre parole' (*Le Discours antillais*, pp. 282-283). This is examined further on.

The Martiniquans Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, and the Puerto Ricans Antonio S. Pedreira and Luis Rafael Sánchez all coincide in seeing French Antillean and Puerto Rican speech as deeply affected by the linguistic tension and colonial predicament of their islands. For Fanon and Glissant, the French Antilleans' alienation manifests itself in linguistic hypertrophy. In their eagerness to portray themselves as cultural equals and even culturally identical to the metropolitans, Fanon argues, the French Antilleans resort to an affected use of French, characterised by a strong tendency to 'verbal delirium' (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, pp. 13-32), what Pedreira calls 'sofistería' and denounces as 'palabra prostituida' in relation to the Puerto Ricans (*Insularismo*, p. 104 and 108). Glissant, who unlike Fanon examines the Martiniquans' attitude to both French and Creole, likewise concludes that his compatriots are unable to maintain a healthy rapport with either language. Thus, because of the conflictive interaction between the two languages, the Martiniquans cannot express themselves in a direct way, without resorting to the *technique du détour*. A parallel can be found in Pedreira, who comments on *el merodeo expresivo*, or 'la salvadora hipocresía verbal' of Puerto Ricans, resulting from the 'tenebrosos problemas coloniales' of the country (*Insularismo*, pp. 100-101). For Glissant, the root of the French Antilleans' problem lies in their loss of the capacity to use all instruments, including language, because they are no longer involved in any economic activity. They are therefore doomed to a *poétique forcée*, occurring 'là où une nécessité d'expression confronte un impossible à exprimer' (*Le Discours antillais*, p. 236). He adds:

La poétique forcée ou contre-poétique est mise en acte par une collectivité dont l'expression ne peut jaillir directement, ne peut provenir d'un exercice autonome du corps social. L'expression, pour bien marquer cette non-autonomie, se frappe elle-même d'une sorte de non-pouvoir, d'un impossible. Ce phénomène s'exaspère du fait que les collectivités dont je parle sont toujours d'abord orales (p. 237).

As Glissant sees it, this leaves the Antilleans with no access to positive expression.

Where the two Martiniquan thinkers and Pedreira see linguistic hypertrophy, Sánchez diagnoses the Puerto Ricans with linguistic atrophy. Like them he ascribes the degradation of his compatriots' speech faculties to the colonial status quo. He points to the widespread linguistic paralysis affecting particularly the young, whom he calls 'la generación o sea', the first generation spawned by the *Estado Libre Asociado*. He notes the same uneasy relation to language as Glissant:

entre nosotros no se maneja la lengua con comodidad, con soltura y cabalidad, con la naturalidad y el empeño de aquel para quien la lengua no es motivo de tensión pero sí el aparato que transmite su vibración íntima [...]. Hablo del embarazo en organizar la experiencia desde la palabra corriente, lozana; hablo de la *dificultad en la posesión firme*, profunda, clara, de nuestra lengua, nuestra única lengua, pese a la mentira burocrática del bilingüismo.<sup>14</sup>

He concludes that there is a need for the young to liberate and assume control of their speech, as the first condition *sine qua non* of total freedom.

### **Towards Nation Language: voices from the Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean**

Across the Caribbean, writers have shared with Shakespeare's Caliban the frustration of resorting to Prospero's tongue in order to curse him, of voicing dissent with the colonial system in the language of the coloniser. When the alternative has been open to them, some have turned to the only indigenous languages left after the extinction of the Amerindians, the various local Creoles. This has occurred for instance in the immediate post-independence literature of Haiti, in rare cases like Gilbert Gratiant in Martinique, in Jamaican dub poetry, or in the very successful Papiamentu literature in the Dutch Antilles. Where no Creole provided such an alternative (as in the Hispanic Caribbean, for instance) or when (for reasons examined later) this did not prove a feasible or satisfactory option, many writers have sought to erode the dominant language through friction with its local variants, in a process which the *créolistes* have hailed as a linguistic and cultural 'conquest'.

The idea that Caliban can now talk back at Prospero has been gaining currency among Caribbean writers since the British decolonisation in the early 1960s. In fact, as the most visible cultural marker, language, and more particularly the phenomenon

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<sup>14</sup> 'La generación o sea', *Claridad* (San Juan), 23 January 1972, p. 22, emphasis added to stress the sexual imagery, an aspect commented upon further on.

of creolisation, has been frequently seen as the site of the black slaves' cultural and by extension political resistance. Thus Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite comments in relation to Jamaica: 'It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled. Within the folk tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself' (p. 237).<sup>15</sup> Brathwaite perpetuates this tradition of rebellion and search for identity in his own poetry, which relies on experimentation with the Caribbean vernaculars, resulting in what he calls 'nation language':

Nation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/ Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English [...] Nation language [...] may be in English: but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout [...]. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time.<sup>16</sup>

In the Hispanic area, *indigenista*, *negrista* and *criollista* writers have successively drawn on the Amerindian, Afro-Antillean and white rural linguistic heritage, experimenting with lexicon, rhythm and proverbs in order to progressively elaborate a literary nation language.<sup>17</sup> With the spectacular industrialisation and urbanisation from the 1950s (especially in Puerto Rico), many writers of later generations developed an interest in urban speech, as exemplified in the Cubans Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Severo Sarduy, the Puerto Ricans Luis Rafael Sánchez and Ana Lydia Vega, or the Dominican Pedro Vergés.<sup>18</sup> In Cabrera

<sup>15</sup> *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971.

<sup>16</sup> *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, London and Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1984, p. 13. Other poets such as Jean Binta Breeze, Opal Palmer Adisa, Erna Brodber (all three from Jamaica), and Merle Collins (from Grenada) also integrate English Creole into their poetry, which strongly relies on sound and rhythm. In fiction, the Barbadian George Lamming, the Trinidadian Sam Selvon, and the Jamaican Olive Senior have managed to capture Caribbean speech. Selvon's technique in *Lonely Londoners* (London: Alan Wingate, 1956, rpt. by Longman, London) is particularly successful, as his Creole voice permeates his style, including the narrative.

<sup>17</sup> According to Humberto López Morales 'island dialectology' is characterised by 'the non-patrimonial lexicon – indigenous, Afro-Cuban, and to a lesser extent, Creole terms – and the results of some phonetic processes that very early started to differentiate Caribbean Spanish from that of great areas of New Spain and of other territories' ('The History of a Literary Language', in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 1, ed. by A. James Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-23). As Barradas notes in relation to Puerto Rico, 'los miembros de la Generación del Cuarenta [...] postulaban la necesidad de emplear un lenguaje estándar y hasta, en algunos casos, casticista' and held the belief that 'el lenguaje más auténtico de cualquier país es el del campesinado' (*Apalabramiento*, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii).

<sup>18</sup> Experimenting with urban speech was obviously one among many ways of forging a 'nation language' in the Hispanic Caribbean. Thus Carpentier opts for a baroque style in his later novels. He shares with José Lezama Lima the view that the baroque best conveys the exuberance of Caribbean and American landscapes. Arguably, in cases like Lezama Lima, Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy and Reinaldo Arenas, this emphasis on language was also an effective way to circumvent censorship.



Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, for instance, the main focus is on language itself, and one intention of the novel is to collect all variants of idiomatic Cuban Spanish, ranging from intellectual and affected language to rural, black and urban speech. The author claims as much in his 'Advertencia', or preface: 'El libro está en cubano. Es decir, escrito en los diferentes dialectos del español que se hablan en Cuba y la escritura no es más que un intento de atrapar la voz humana al vuelo, como aquel que dice. [...] predomina como un acento el habla de los habaneros y en particular la jerga nocturna, que, como en todas las grandes ciudades, tiende a ser un idioma secreto'.<sup>19</sup>

Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* is likewise a novel based on language itself, denouncing the superfluity stemming from the neo-colonial *impasse*. Its very title, recalling Cabrera Infante's tongue-twisting *Tres tristes tigres*, signals the author's playful attitude towards language. The protagonists are immersed in triviality, omnipresent in superficial advertising jingles, shallow political slogans, or meaningless lyrics of popular songs, like the *guaracha* of the title repeated on the radio to the point of nausea. As in the Cuban novel, the several protagonists – including the radio commentator (reminiscent of Cabrera Infante's *Tropicana* show presenter Emsí) announcing the hit of the year, the *guaracha* – are disparate in age and class, and identifiable by a distinctive idiolect.<sup>20</sup> *La guaracha* is thus an illustration of what Luis Rafael Sánchez calls 'escribir en puertorriqueño': while incorporating the numerous Anglicisms commonly heard in Puerto Rico – reflecting the impact of the growing US social and cultural imperialism on society at large – it offers a wide range of local idioms, proverbs and popular sayings, allusions to popular culture (both Puerto Rican and US) and private jokes that often belong to a more educated register, thereby transforming, in Julia Daroquí's words, 'el lenguaje marginal del proletariado en lengua altamente literaria' (*Las pesadillas de la historia*, p. 82).

<sup>19</sup> Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Tres tristes tigres*, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1973 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1967).

<sup>20</sup> Nonsensical rhyme and a flowery rhetoric for the Senator, colloquialisms and a popular speech riddled with proverbs for his proletarian mistress La China, an affected language and numerous insertions of English phrases for the upper-class Graciela, and linguistic paralysis for her son Benny, the epitome of what Sánchez calls 'la generación o sea', totally assimilated to the US model of consumerism while being utterly unproductive. The repeated allusions to Benny's latent homosexuality could be interpreted in the context of the metaphorical emasculation (through assimilation) of the colonised described by Glissant and Marqués. By contrast, the radio commentator's tautological discourse displays signs of the linguistic hypertrophy discussed above.

Many argue that the Puerto Ricans are now a divided people, with almost a half residing on the mainland (primarily in the region of New York city), of which a great proportion use English as their first language. Puerto Rican writing reflects this reality: while one part of the literary production continues to be written in Spanish and often centres on the socio-political predicament of the island, the other part is written in English and usually recollects the experience of emigration.<sup>21</sup> On the island, the polemic around language had obvious repercussions among writers. For instance, Ana Lydia Vega, who was English-educated but later developed pro-independence sentiments, relates in 'Pulseando con el difícil' how she was so intensely torn by the dilemma that she opted out by studying French at university: 'Paradojicamente, la selección del francés como área de especialización académica despejó bastante la atmósfera de tensión lingüística en que me debatía' (p. 17).<sup>22</sup> She deals with the issue of language as a signifier of political commitment, this time in connection with the average Puerto Rican, in 'Pollito chicken', discussed shortly.

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<sup>21</sup> Puerto Rican writing in English includes the so-called Nuyorican poets, notably Tato Laviera, Sandra María Esteves and Miguel Algarín, as well as the novelists Piri Thomas, Nicholasa Mohr, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Esmeralda Santiago and Alba Nydia Ambert, among others. This literature, particularly the poetry, largely relies on the technique of code switching, whereby the authors seek to erode the hegemonic status of English in the United States through the propagation of Spanish. At the same time, using Spanish enables them to recover (or ensure to the survival of) their Puerto Rican cultural heritage. Thus Judith Ortiz Cofer believes that sporadic inclusions of Spanish enable her to 'season' her prose and give it more 'flavour', while also being a way of putting memory into function within the text, as she explains in an interview with Carmen Dolores Hernández (*Puerto Rican Voices in English: Interviews with Writers*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997). With code switching or the insertion of Spanish into an English text, many of these writers want to signify their resistance to US cultural assimilation and their dissent from government authorities, notably in the treatment of Puerto Rican immigrants. Insofar as it draws on a double heritage to forge a more appropriate literary voice, code switching could be said to be similar to the linguistic project of the numerous Francophone Caribbean writers who experiment with French and Creole. Yet because it is restricted to the diaspora (the subject of the final chapter), this writing will not be examined here.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps symptomatic of the Puerto Rican linguistic insecurity is the case of Rosario Ferré, who published her novels *The House on the Lagoon* (1995) and *Eccentric Neighborhoods* (1998) in English, generating a heated debate. While book reviews by Ramón Albino and Camen Dolores Hernández (*El Nuevo Día*, San Juan, 25 September and 8 October 1995) do not challenge the author's alleged claim to write in English in order to conquer the US literary market and gain wider popularity, other critics such as Gerald Guinness have found this position problematic (*The San Juan Star*, San Juan, 22 October 1995, p. 12). It is surprising indeed that Ferré, a writer with a solid reputation at home and abroad already, should resort to such linguistic acrobatics, thereby running the risk of estranging her Puerto Rican readership, even though her own Spanish 'translation' of the novel was published subsequently. In the light of the sensitive nature of the language issue in the country, and of the author's public declarations in recent years suggesting that her politics have moved from pro-independence to pro-statehood, Ferré's controversial switch to English virtually amounts to a political statement. Ferré's position is in stark contrast with that of pro-independence authors such as Pedro Juan Soto or Ana Lydia Vega, both fluent in English, who, while they explore a border language, introducing in their Spanish a significant amount of English terms, refuse to publish any creative writing in English.

Vega's approach to language is very similar to Sánchez's. 'Letras para salsa y tres soneos por encargo' recounts an encounter between a professional womaniser, the Tipo, and his 'victim', the rather consenting Tipa.<sup>23</sup> The story abounds in references to popular culture, from salsa, basketball games and soap operas, to 'The Godfather', 'Superman', 'Playboy', and so on. In most instances, popular culture is in fact parodied: the Tipo 'complimenting' the women walking down the street is compared to a 'salsero solitario [...] soneando sin tregua', while his cry of victory 'encestaaaaaaaaa', when the Tipa turns round to talk to him, together with the 'rictus más telenovel' he puts on later to hide his embarrassment, both betray his addiction to the small screen, especially basketball games and soap operas. The narrator's irony does not spare the higher culture either: there is a mocking allusion to Luis Palés Matos and left-wing Puerto Rican intellectuals, and the story ends on a caricature of both Marxist and feminist rhetoric. But above all, it is the Tipo's *machismo*, captured in his pick-up phrases, that attracts Vega's sarcasm: 'el salsero solitario vuelve al pernil, soneando sin tregua: qué chasis, negra, qué masetera estás, [...] mama, quién fuera lluvia para caelte encima' (*Virgenes y mártires*, p. 83). This sexist discourse, recalling many salsa lyrics, commodifies the woman: 'qué chula está esta hembrota, men, [...] tanta carne y yo comiendo hueso' (p. 83), 'trigueña, si te mango te hago leña [...] por ti soy capaz hasta de trabajal, pa quién te estarás guardando en nevera, abusadora' (p. 84). The Tipo's speech is typical Puerto Rican street language: 'Me la llevé pa un motel, men, ahora le tumban a uno siete cocos por un polvillo' (p. 85). This speech, with the customary English insertions and the hyperboles characteristic of Puerto Rican slang, permeates the narrative voice: 'En la De Diego fiebra la fiesta patronal de nalgas. Rotundas en sus pantis super-look, [...] abismales, olímpicas, nucleares, surcan las aceras riopedrenses como invencibles aeronaves nacionales' (p. 83). Thus through local idioms and slang, combined with a transcription capturing a specific pronunciation, in addition to cultural references ranging over the whole social spectrum, Vega creates a literary voice eminently Puerto Rican, to the point that language becomes the fortress from which she undertakes the defence of the island's culture.

'Pollito chicken' dramatises the conflict between English and Spanish, US and local culture in Puerto Rican society. The title is taken from a rhyme used in the

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<sup>23</sup> Ana Lydia Vega and Carmen Lugo Filippi, *Virgenes y mártires*, San Juan: Editorial Antillana, 1994, p. 83 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1981).

school system to teach Puerto Rican children English. It therefore alludes to the various educational programmes carried out to achieve the Anglicisation of Puerto Rico. This is confirmed by the epigraph to the story, a quotation by Albert Memmi: 'Un homme à cheval sur deux cultures est rarement bien assis'. Again there are numerous references to both popular and higher cultures: next to a humorous wink at Césaire's narrative poem ('el surprise return de Suzie Bermiúdez a su native land', p. 75) are mentions of Hollywood ('a streetcar named desire'), and US magazines and advertisements. In the story, island-born and bred Suzie Bermiúdez, now a mainland resident, visits Puerto Rico for the first time in ten years. The Suzie who returns, however, is completely Americanised – as evidenced in the spelling of her surname, whose additional 'i' transcribes a US pronunciation – and a fervent defender of the US political and cultural assimilation of the island and its inhabitants. Like the colonised described in Fanon, her ideological position is reflected in her speech: she insists on speaking English to her compatriots, while her inner thoughts are in Spanglish. Thus here English is used as a marker of cultural alienation. It pervades not only Suzie's language, but the narrative voice too, so that the whole story is written in Spanglish: 'Tan confused quedó la blushing young lady tras este discovery que, recogiendo su Coppertone suntan oil, su beach towel y su terry-cloth bata, huyó desperately hacia el de luxe suite y se cobijó bajo los refreshing mauve bedsheets de su cama queen size' (p. 78). Yet, as further discussed later on, what Vega's story debunks is not so much bilingualism as the inferiority complex suffered by Susie, who systematically debases Puerto Rican culture and society, while venerating the US way of life. As the author argues in 'Pulseando con el difícil', the quarrel with English in Puerto Rico is pointless: what is needed is the re-evaluation of Spanish and the local culture, so that the acquisition of English and assimilation of US culture can be done critically, without fear, and on solid bases.<sup>24</sup>

Creole is by essence an oral language, with little written tradition and until recently no universal transcription. The diglossia that prevails in the Francophone Caribbean has thus posed an acute dilemma to writers in the region. A few decades back when illiteracy rates were high (and this is still largely the case today in Haiti), a text, whether in French or Creole, was by necessity of very limited local

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<sup>24</sup> Sylviane Telchid makes the same argument for the integration of Creole to the French Caribbean curriculum; as she sees it, Creole should be used as a platform for the teaching of French.

resonance. Writing in French at least presented the potential advantage of attracting a larger readership from the Francophone world. In addition, as the language of instruction, and particularly since pursuing higher education long implied leaving the native island for extended periods of time, French had frequently become more natural than Creole to early writers: Aimé Césaire is a case in point. On the other hand, the writers who wished to express themselves in Creole (like Gilbert Gratiant, for instance) had to face the difficulties of publishing for a very reduced, Creolophone readership, who in any case also read French. Indeed, even today the community of French Creole speakers barely adds up to 8 million, a figure largely constituted by the 6 million Haitians, among whom illiteracy is high.<sup>25</sup>

This explains why for a long time most Francophone Caribbean writers opted for standard French.<sup>26</sup> From the 1970s onward however, a growing awareness that standard French is not the most appropriate medium to convey Caribbean reality has led more and more writers to seek alternatives. A minority, such as Frankétienne (Haiti) and Raphaël Confiant (Martinique), began to write in Creole.<sup>27</sup> More writers have tried to adjust standard French to the Caribbean reality. Thus, without writing in Creole, Édouard Glissant has striven to find a collective voice that more adequately reflects the reality of the Caribbean people.<sup>28</sup> On the surface, his

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<sup>25</sup> Although French Creole is also spoken in the Seychelles, Mauritius and Reunion, the significant linguistic differences between Caribbean and Indian Ocean variants make them not always mutually understandable.

<sup>26</sup> Writing in standard French, however, is not tantamount to following the French canon: many *francophonie* writers actually experiment precisely with the French language, as perhaps best illustrated by Césaire. While Césaire's style bears little influence of Creole, its innovation relies on neologisms, the inclusion of exotic terms, the combination of a rare, outdated lexicon with colloquialisms, and above all the introduction of an African-based musicality. Thus Césaire's revolutionary message is coupled with linguistic novelty. On the other hand, many authors writing in Creole have shown little interest in formal or linguistic innovation. Besides much of early Creolophone writing, including the work of the French Guyanese Alain Parépou, Confiant finds the approach to Creole of several Haitian authors little innovative (*Lettres créoles*, p. 174).

<sup>27</sup> Confiant shows how in *Dézaft* Frankétienne is not content with reproducing daily Haitian speech, but seeks to elaborate a Creole literary tongue by forging a new language enriched with rare lexical items, like the secret code of cockfighting. For Confiant, Frankétienne thereby designates 'le lieu de l'haïtianité fondamentale' as different from 'la norme extravertie des couches urbanisées de la population' (*Lettres créoles*, p. 174). In this respect, Frankétienne's work on Creole parallels that of Césaire on French. His innovative and challenging approach to the language, emulated by Raphaël Confiant, is essential to the promotion and survival of Creole. Yet, because few people actually read Creole, the diffusion of such works (except the plays, which are widely performed) remains limited, and Frankétienne and Confiant have subsequently reverted to French.

<sup>28</sup> Celia Britton shows the importance for Glissant of assisting the French Antilleans to become 'a community that can act in its own name' by creating a collective narrative voice that 'does not impose a false, coercive uniformity [...] sufficiently fluid and flexible to include all the different voices within the community' ('Collective Narrative Voice in Three Novels by Édouard Glissant', pp. 136-137, in *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing*, ed. by Sam Haigh, Oxford/New York: Berg, 1999, pp. 135-147).

language resembles conventional French. Yet on a closer look, it is extremely opaque and has a strong Creole resonance. The *technique de l'opacité* allows Glissant to erode standard French through constant interrogation. He stresses the subversive nature of opacity, seeing it as '[une] valeur à opposer à toute tentative pseudo-humaniste de réduire les hommes à l'échelle d'un modèle universel' (*Le Discours antillais*, p. 278).<sup>29</sup> Creole itself relies on opacity: as the language of the slaves acting as secret code on specific occasions, it has developed a hermetic quality, largely based on what Glissant calls 'la ruse du détour' (a practice called *palé an daki* in Haiti), and thus functioned as a tool of resistance. According to Jermann, Glissant's style displays the same characteristic as Caribbean French in general. The author 'esquive la fluidité du discours et remet en question la perspective épurée de la langue dominante' by conferring on his prose 'une âpre sauvagerie, le pouvoir de l'alogique'. Thus his language stands as a 'réécriture du français colonial' (pp. 98-99). The Caribbean writer's task is to transcribe this nation language into a literary tongue.

Roumain also sought to forge a border language accessible to non-Creolophone readers while still evoking a certain Creole reality. His linguistic experimentation with Creole within a text written in French incited Glissant, Schwarz-Bart, and more recently the writers labelled *créolistes* to similar undertakings. Such an alternative allows Haitian and French Caribbean writers to accommodate both a local Creolophone and a foreign, exclusively Francophone audience. This is all the more crucial in that, as Glissant's discussion of the linguistic status quo demonstrates, it is currently the most viable response available to these writers. More than simply *incorporating* Creole syntactic or lexical features to his French, in *Gouverneurs de la Rosée* Roumain actually *invents* a Creole-sounding lexicon and syntax understandable by Haitian and French readers alike.<sup>30</sup> So although the French of the novel has a distinctively Creole ring to it, it is actually a construct. Roumain's nation language mostly relies on two features: creoleness and orality. He achieves the first by retrieving obsolete French dialects that constitute the etymological basis of most

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<sup>29</sup> This notion of opacity, to which Sylvia Wynter refers as 'the metaphor of blocking', is central to Glissant's work as a whole. See her 'Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles' (*World Literature Today*, 63: 4, Autumn 1989, pp. 637-647) and 'Les traditions créoles dans la littérature contemporaine de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique' (*Matatu* 12, ed. by M. Glaser and M. Pausch, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-110) by Alexandra Jermann.

<sup>30</sup> *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, Paris: Editeurs Réunis, 1946 (1<sup>st</sup> edition Port-au-Prince, 1944).

of the Creole lexicon, and the second by conveying the rhythm of Creole speech to his prose. As Hoffmann shows, Roumain derives much of his vocabulary from various dialects spoken in the sixteenth and seventeenth century by the first French settlers of the Caribbean (hereafter designated as 'French dialect'), rather than from modern standard French. Such a technique presents the advantage of forging neologisms both understandable by the Creolophone reader and seemingly familiar to the Francophone reader.<sup>31</sup> The orality derived from Caribbean story-telling is also palpable from the very opening of the novel. Finally, Roumain 'creolises' French by simply *transposing*, or translating literally Creole phrases into French.<sup>32</sup>

Roumain's great achievement was not to restrict his innovative prose to dialogues, but extend it to the narrative (in the first person), including descriptions.<sup>33</sup> He thus sustains his forged language throughout the novel, thereby eradicating the dichotomy (and the ensuing hierarchy) between vernacular and official language, the oral and the written word, Creole and French, that using creolised French in dialogues and standard French for the rest of the novel would have somehow reproduced.<sup>34</sup> In this respect the success of novels such as Joseph Zobel's *La Rue cases-nègres* (1950) and Jacques Stephen Alexis's *Compère Général Soleil* (1955), where creolised French is restricted to dialogues and free indirect speech, is more limited.<sup>35</sup> The French of Zobel's dialogues rests on a transposition of Creole into

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<sup>31</sup> Hoffmann provides a detailed analysis of Roumain's language in 'Complexité linguistique et rhétorique dans "Gouverneurs de la Rosée" de Jacques Roumain', *Présence Africaine* 98, Paris, 2<sup>ème</sup> trimestre 1976, pp. 145-161). For instance, Roumain systematically uses the dialect forms 'drète' and 'frète' (in Creole *dwèt* and *fwèt*) instead of modern French *droit* and *froid*, or the term 'mitan' (*mitan* in Creole) for *milieu*. The same applies to words like 'bailler' (as in the phrase 'se bailler la main'), elaborated on the same etymological root as the Creole *ban*, which replaces *donner*, the term Creolophones would actually use in French, and 'gourmer' (in Creole *goumé*), for *se battre*. Haitians would understand these neologisms – the very stuff of Roumain's writing – because of their proximity with Creole; many neologisms derived from French dialect remain close enough to the modern form not to obstruct comprehension for Francophone readers. In the case of 'mitan', 'bailler' and 'gourmer', the educated Francophone reader may infer their meaning through their familiarity with words such as 'milieu' and 'midi' for the first, and 'bail' and 'gourmander' for the last two, or else resort to the context.

<sup>32</sup> Thus in 'Je me demande de quel côté est Manuel' (p. 27), the Creolophone reader virtually hears '*an ka mandé mwen ki koté Manuel*'; Creole resonates in '*de quel côté*', transposed from the Creole *ki koté* (where). See Michèle Praeger on what she calls 'créole transposé' in 'Figures de l'Antillanité dans les romans de Simone Schwarz-Bart', p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, the description beginning: 'Compère, tu ne connais pas la source de Mahotièr? C'est que tu n'es pas de ces parages, frère...' and stretching on one and a half pages (*Gouverneurs de la rosée*, pp. 165-166).

<sup>34</sup> Admittedly, the beginning of the book contains a few descriptions in standard French, which disappear as the book progresses. It was published posthumously: had it not been for his premature death, the author might have re-worked some passages and eliminated standard French completely.

<sup>35</sup> *Compère Général Soleil*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955; *La Rue cases-nègres*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1974 (1<sup>re</sup> edition 1950).

French, which in many ways is characteristic of actual Antillean French. On the other hand, Alexis's language adopts Roumain's technique, from which he borrows several neologisms. His style is also strongly marked by orality. Yet Creole language and the Haitian reality are more discreet in *Compère Général Soleil* than in Roumain's novel.<sup>36</sup>

The decision taken by Alexis, Zobel (especially in *La Rue cases-nègres*) and other early writers to use a predominantly standard French prose was obviously motivated by the very high level of illiteracy among their compatriots: to be read, these writers had to target a French public. The progress of education offers more alternatives to contemporary Haitian or French Caribbean writers: since they can now rely on a local, Creolophone audience, they can also choose to write in Creole or creolised French. One of the first to take advantage of these social changes was Simone Schwarz-Bart. Like Roumain, she manages to sustain a forged, creolised language throughout her novel *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, including the narrative. This is certainly facilitated by her use of the first person, which makes the inclusion of orality and Creole more natural to the reader. Unlike Roumain she does not resort to neologisms: her technique rests principally on the transposition of Creole words, phrases and proverbs into French. Thus, while Roumain's language is an intellectual construct, Schwarz-Bart's tongue is more directly inspired by the daily speech of the Guadeloupeans. Bernabé details how such transpositions impregnate the French text with a Creole cultural subtext, so that together with Creole words, sayings and proverbs, Creole culture, wisdom and beliefs are integrated to the novel.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The orality of the narrative voice is evident from the opening of the novel, as in the following passage: 'La misère est une femme folle, vous dis-je. Je la connais bien, la garce, je l'ai vue traîner dans les capitales, les villes, les faubourgs de la moitié de la terre. Cette femelle enragée est la même partout' (pp. 7-8). Alexis also draws on Creole proverbs and sayings. Thus the Creole adage '*derrière les montagnes il y a d'autres montagnes*', meaning that a problem never comes alone, sustains the following metaphor: 'Les vieilles gens disent que *derrière les montagnes il y a d'autres montagnes*; derrière la montagne il y a aussi d'autres villes. Il y a des villes qui se fanent. Les montagnes aussi se fanent parce que la terre n'est plus grasse et ses os de pierre, délavés par le vent et l'orage, montrent leur misère au soleil. Derrière ces montagnes qui roussissent, il y a nos villes, rongées par les poux de bois, nos villes qui noircissent...' (*Compère Général Soleil*, p. 35). Because in the proverb the mountains are connected to peasant poverty, here, as if mirroring the rural exodus, Alexis transposes the metaphor of poverty from 'montagne' to 'ville', which serves his Communist concerns.

<sup>37</sup> One recurring example is the phrase 'moi et mes deux seins', which to a French reader is quite hermetic but means in Creole 'by myself', as in (of a woman) achieving something on her own. The expression thus evokes the strength of the Guadeloupean woman. See Bernabé, 'Le travail de l'écriture chez Simone Schwartz-Bart [*sic*]', *Présence Africaine* 120-121 (Paris, 1982), pp. 166-179 and *Lettres créoles*, pp. 182-185, as well as Praeger's article, Maryse Condé's book review in



Yet Jean Bernabé shows how Schwarz-Bart does not simply transcribe Creole sayings and proverbs into French, but adapts them to her novelistic and stylistic purposes. Many similes and metaphors in the novel elaborate on Creole sayings. For instance, Elie tells Télumée: 'Te voilà une femme [...] et je te regarde et je vois que tu es comme un beau fruit à pain mûr, à point' (p. 118). This comparison of Télumée to a ripe breadfruit has as subtext the Creole proverb '*fanm sé chantaïn, nom sé fwi a pen*', where the woman is compared to a Caribbean chestnut in order to underline her endurance, as opposed to the man, compared to a breadfruit, which bursts onto the ground in its fall from the tree. Here, the proverbial metaphor is adapted, since it is of breadfruit that Télumée reminds Elie, and the notion of ripeness, evoking her sensuality, replaces that of decay. By drawing on the Creole subtext, the author is also able to underline the protagonist's strength and endurance.

The *créolité* movement is now thoroughly engaged in the search for a literary nation language that would enhance the status of Creole. *Créolistes* such as Chamoiseau, Confiant, Pépin, Pineau and Telchid repeat and adapt the techniques developed by Roumain, Glissant, Schwarz-Bart, and others.<sup>38</sup> Across the Caribbean, the notion of nation language, with its infinite varieties, has therefore enabled many writers to pursue linguistic innovation while overcoming the Caliban complex.

### **Linguistic hybridity in women's fiction from Puerto Rico and Guadeloupe**

Given the cultural syncretism that characterises Caribbean societies, it is perhaps no surprise that linguistic experimentation with a nation language relying on hybridity should prove particularly engaging to writers. Yet in Puerto Rico, the concept of hybridity remains largely contested by a nationalist elite. Here again their discourse on language and culture imbricates with gender. Frances Negrón-Muntañer points out that many Puerto Rican canonical writers have depicted the process of cultural creolisation prior to 1898 as pleasurable, thus ignoring its inherent violence and the power relationship that underlay it:

Many of the most circulated sets of tropes for Spanish among the writings of language nationalists uphold racial, sexual, and gender hierarchies. [...] Within the context of the metaphorization of Spanish in Puerto Rico, imagined sexual exchanges are represented as historically inevitable and pleasurable. The 'pleasure' of these encounters is made possible by

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*Présence Africaine* 84 (4<sup>ème</sup> trimestre 1972), pp. 138-139, and Karen Smyley Wallace's 'Créolité and the Feminine Text in Simone Schwarz-Bart', *The French Review*, 70: 4, March 1997, pp. 554-561.

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed discussion see Alexandra Jermann's article.

the assumption of symmetrical social relations where hierarchies along the lines of race, gender, and class do not exist. Writer Luis Rafael Sánchez, for instance, defines Puerto Rican Spanish as 'Puertorriqueño del hablar dulce y cadencioso, hablar del viejo amor entre las negritas dingas y los peninsulares retóricos'.<sup>39</sup>

While Sánchez incontestably regards this linguistic, cultural and ethnic *mestizaje* as positive, Negrón-Muntañer remarks that other writers (and this would also apply to Cuba and the Dominican Republic) have commonly viewed this as inferiority: a typical example in the 1930s was Antonio Pedreira.<sup>40</sup> Some *casticistas*, or reactionary purists, would even deny the cultural syncretism that has taken place in Puerto Rico, defending the culture of the Peninsula.<sup>41</sup> Hence the revolutionary aspect of Martí's writing, Palés Matos's *negrismo* and Guillén's notion of *mestizaje*. Severo Colberg's 1990 statement 'El idioma no es un *café con leche*' (emphasis added) reveals on the other hand the pejorative connotations some associate to the hybrid, the creolised, the *mestizo* or *mulato*.<sup>42</sup> Although those have become rather scarce, today similar arguments are commonly invoked in relation to the influence of US English on Puerto Rican Spanish. Indeed, for many Puerto Rican intellectuals the cultural and linguistic evolution of the island since 1898, generally regarded as the last phase in the creolisation process, is a regression.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Puerto Rican Jam*, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-267. Negrón-Muntañer cites from Sánchez's 'Puertorriqueño', *El Nuevo Día* 20 April 1990, p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> In *Insularismo*, Pedreira ascribes the bravery and determination of Puerto Ricans to their European ancestry, and their rebelliousness to their Amerindian blood, but notes that both are cancelled out by the passivity inherited from the black slaves: 'En instantes [...] en que afloran en nuestros gestos los ritmos marciales de la sangre europea, somos capaces de las más altas empresas y de los más esforzados heroísmos. Pero cuando el gesto viene empapado de oleadas de sangre africana quedamos indecisos, como embobados [...]. [U]n punto de partida para interpretar nuestro carácter "tan mezclado y equívoco" es la variedad de reacciones que responden a secretos estímulos biológicos. [...] La gota de sangre india que aún corre en nuestras venas se subleva un instante para ser sofocada por el ímpetu conquistador o esclavista. El resultado es el *laissez faire* tropical, en espera de mejor oportunidad, y mientras llega nos sometemos calladamente improvisando siempre una disculpa' (pp. 32-33).

<sup>41</sup> Pablo Navarro cites the examples of Marqués, Laguerre, Canales, Díaz Alfaro, and the poetry of the Atalayistas, among others ('Idioma y educación en Puerto Rico', *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5). Negrón-Muntañer also mentions Juan Manuel Carrión among those who ignore or at least minimise racial *mestizaje* in the Antilles (pp. 267-268).

<sup>42</sup> 'El español: Idioma oficial', *El Mundo*, 3 Sept. 1990, p. 27, quoted by Negrón-Muntañer p. 269.

<sup>43</sup> For Juan Flores, however, the Puerto Rican emigration to the US is the attic of José Luis González's edifice. He sees it as a positive phenomenon, as a reversed invasion. 'González slights two essential stages in the history of Puerto Rican culture: the pre-Columbian, Taíno heritage and the cultural experience of Puerto Ricans in the United States. These two extremities, if they do not each constitute floors of their own, at least warrant consideration as the basement and the attic of González's building' ('The Puerto Rico that José Luis González Built', p. 66, first published in 1984, re-printed in *Divided Borders*, pp. 61-70). Interpreting the Puerto Rican government's attempt to restore Spanish as the sole official language in 1991 as un 'deseo de pureza', Díaz Quiñones asks: '¿Qué alcance tiene la definición del idioma único ante la hibridez y mezcla del español, del inglés y del spanglish que se oye en Bayamón, Puerto Nuevo o en Union City?' (*La memoria rota*, p. 144).

Here it is worthwhile to recall the role played by women in the production and transmission of the syncretic Caribbean cultures. Because emigration and education long remained male prerogatives, it could be argued that, particularly but not exclusively in the upper classes, women have had few ways of escaping the creolisation process, while men had more opportunities of immediate contact with the long competing official, metropolitan cultures. That this factor would make women critical agents of creolisation could partly explain why reactionary thinkers like Pedreira view this process as effeminacy. Indeed, the discourses promoting a negative vision of linguistic creolisation rest on a specific gendering that further reinforces the conception of creolisation as regression. There is a real fear in some sectors of the Puerto Rican intelligentsia that the linguistic 'contamination' of English, coupled with the gradual implantation of English as the language of business and consequently that of prestige, would make Spanish the 'language of the kitchen' (in Negrón-Muntañer's words, p. 268), relegated to the private sphere in a diglossic pattern recalling the linguistic predicament of the Francophone area. For Negrón-Muntañer, however, such fears are totally unfounded, and only reiterate the sexist assumption that nationalism equates with virility. The very metaphor of the kitchen, she notes, suggests that Spanish would then become the language of women. So the hybridity resulting from the creolisation process is envisaged once more as a form of emasculation: another manifestation of the 'Malinche syndrome'. The decrease in virility such a metaphor connotes is reinforced by the fact that in biological terms, hybrids are sterile.

Negrón-Muntañer also notes the classism and racism embedded in such a position. Many deplore the increasing influence of English in the local vernacular, pointing to the large Puerto Rican community in the US and its linguistic practices as a pitfall to be avoided. 'In the context of bilingual Puerto Ricans, particularly the ones raised in the United States,' Negrón-Muntañer adds, 'feminization comes packaged in the notion of the *medio hombre* (half man)' popularised in the 1930s by Pedreira and Epifanio Fernández Vanga (p.269).<sup>44</sup> Large-scale emigration primarily

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<sup>44</sup> The position of Pedreira in *Insularismo*, however, is more complex. Although he clearly sees *mestizaje* as a flaw and deplores the cultural influence of the United States, on the linguistic level it is the inadequacy of the bilingual education policy (which fails to meet the needs of Puerto Rican students), and not the learning of English *per se*, that Pedreira opposes: 'La inestabilidad del momento histórico que ahora vivimos se verá claramente en las fluctuaciones del bilingüismo. Fuera de toda disputa queda la necesidad y el deber de manejar a perfección ambas lenguas [...]. Yo no creo que el aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa haya perjudicado en nada fundamental la pureza de la

involved the working class, mostly black – as opposed to the white ruling class that temporarily exiled itself to pursue a US education – and it is not incidental that the bilingualism practised by these *nuyoricans*, whose most emblematic, but not sole, mode of expression is Spanglish, is scorned as linguistic degeneration. In fact, many of these language nationalists would go as far as to maintain that *nuyoricans* are not bilingual, but competent in neither English nor Spanish: ‘the negative connotation attached to bilingualism as “half tongue” refers not to bilingualism itself but to linguistic exchange between practices considered not “standard” ’ (p. 272).<sup>45</sup> Hence their demands that on the island the government took measures to ward off the threat that these linguistic practices, as well as the growing number of English dominant Puerto Ricans, pose to their hegemony, both in cultural and social spheres. On the contrary, Negrón-Muntañer calls for the celebration of the cultural syncretism undergone by Puerto Ricans both in and outside the island, what she calls the ‘Spanglish planet’.

So for some, Puerto Rican Spanish is to be kept pure of any debilitating deviance from the peninsular standard or corrosion brought about by contact with US English and US culture. What is of particular interest here is the element of gender that underlies such an argument. Indeed, a corollary assumption of *casticismo* is that only virility can prevent cultural degeneration. If the cultural evolution of the country since the US invasion is understood as the latest stage of the creolisation process (as Juan Flores sees it), then textual bilingual practices amount to a celebration, or at least a recognition, of creolisation. It is certainly no coincidence that writers who view more positively the phenomenon of cultural and linguistic creolisation, especially in the post-US invasion era, should at the same time, for the most part, belong to what Barradas terms the ‘corriente anti-machista’, as illustrated by Pedro Juan Soto, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Manuel Ramos Otero, Ana Lydia Vega, and Mayra Santos (*Apalabramiento*, pp. xix-xx).

Although they do underline the problematic relationship between English and Spanish in Puerto Rico, namely, the colonial pattern that underlies it, these writers

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lengua hispánica. [...] En cambio, el semiaprendizaje de todas las asignaturas en inglés va mermando el volumen de voces españolas y hay momentos en que hasta carecemos de vocabulario para expresarnos en conversaciones simples y elementales’ (*Insularismo*, p. 78).

<sup>45</sup> Even Nicolás Guillén displays such prejudice in his ‘Canción puertorriqueña’ (1958). This poem reads: ‘¿En qué lengua me entiendes,/ en qué lengua por fin te podré hablar,/ si en yes,/ si en sí,/ si en bien,/ si en well,/ si en mal,/ si en bad, si en very bad?’, *Sóngoro cosongo y otros poemas*, Madrid: Alianza editorial, 1980, p. 103.

are indeed quite receptive to the incorporation of English into their prose. Soto, Sánchez and Vega were among the early island-based writers to explore the linguistic implications of Puerto Rican emigration and the US cultural imposition at home, which makes them, to phrase it in Negrón-Muntañer's words, early advocates of the Spanglish planet. Yet at the same time they recognise the violence involved in this creolisation process: in Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* and Vega's 'Pollito chicken', for instance, English thus becomes the marker of the alienation resulting from the colonial predicament.

Indeed, what Vega mocks in the story discussed above is not bilingual practices *per se*, but the colonial mentality that motivates Suzie to use English rather than her mother tongue while in Puerto Rico. The barman, also perfectly bilingual but with no identity complex, is viewed positively, and his attitude to English and Spanish contrasts with Suzie's: 'La tipa del 306 no se sabe si es gringa o pueltorra, bródel. Pide room service en inglés legal pero, cuando la pongo a gozal, abre la boca a gritar en boricua' (*Virgenes y mártires*, p. 79). By valuing the barman's domination of English 'con acento digno de Comisionado Residente en Washington' (p. 79), Vega thus recognises the need for Puerto Ricans to master English, given their socio-political context. This position is radically different from that of the *casticistas*, whose defence of a 'Spanish only' position seems dictacted from an ivory tower. Yet the specific connotations English acquires in Vega captures her ambivalence towards a language that remains an imposition on the Puerto Ricans.

English is often used as a marker of US cultural and economic domination in Mayra Santos too. In *Pez de vidrio* and *El cuerpo correcto*, Santos follows Sánchez and Vega in incorporating English as well as local colloquialisms and idioms into her prose, thus reproducing quite closely contemporary Puerto Rican speech. The influence of Vega (especially of the two stories discussed above) on Santos's style is particularly noticeable in 'Nightstand' and 'Pez de vidrio'. By inserting in the former story terms and phrases such as 'nightstand', 'beautician', 'gin and tonic', or 'New York and San Diego', Santos (as Sánchez does with Graciela in his novel) denounces the fierce consumerism of her fashionable, mannequin-like protagonist Steffanie, determined to get a man who owns a 'Volvo y no Subaru', and would provide the material comfort to which she aspires. The repeated phrase '[ella tiene] sed y hambre de justicia', which becomes the leitmotiv of the story, is seemingly

intended to legitimate Steffanie's claims to such material comfort. These claims are debunked throughout, however, as the story reveals instead the acute materialism of the protagonist, for whom success means finding a man who owns a key to a luxurious apartment in a wealthy district of San Juan, a second one to a prestigious office, and a third to a fancy car.

The location and nature of these insertions of English is indicative of the role this language plays in Santos's prose. Despite the title, no English term is found in the first paragraph, in which Steffanie is walking towards the nightclub. The first English word, 'Franklins', appears in the second paragraph, as Steffanie is walking up the stairs to the club. It is only in the club that the use of English intensifies. Once the protagonist leaves the club accompanied by a man, the number of English insertions decreases. So English is clearly linked to consumerism, fashion, and modern life, of which the nightclub is the temple – hence the emblematic title, 'nightstand'. It is indeed no coincidence that the first English term to appear in the story, besides the title, should refer to money.

Steffanie's profession – 'ella es *beautician*' (emphasis added) – further reveals the protagonist's obsession with image. This is underlined by the description given of her in the opening paragraph: 'Allá va, oronda la niña, [...] con sus tacos nuevos y su pelo nuevo, con sus ojos nuevos y su sexo nuevecito [salpicado de neón, autografiado en lycra], los maniqués de último modelo tan parecidos a ella', (p. 13). What is most significant about this description, however, is its statement regarding the appearance to which the protagonist aspires: 'su pelo nuevo' (that is, freshly straightened) and 'sus ojos nuevos' (possibly her coloured contact lenses) both suggest that Steffanie's models are whiter than herself. The story thus implies that the US dictate the Puerto Rican way of life: not only in their consuming habits ('gin and tonic'), and leisure (US-style nightclubs, travels to 'New York *and* San Diego'), but, more crucially, in their values. The dominant norms are those of the Anglo-Saxons, who have succeeded in imposing their aesthetic canons on Afro-Puerto Ricans, as will be discussed further on in connection with the story 'Hebra rota'.

English is likewise used as a signifier of a way of life modelled on the US in 'Pez de vidrio'. The opening paragraph is riddled with English terms: '*cover charge*' (italicised in the original), 'vodka tonic', 'high tech', 'technopop'. This is followed by the enumeration of the content of the protagonist's handbag (a device already found in Vega's 'Letras para salsa'): 'polvera, *lipstick*, pañuelitos desechables,

llaves y al fin, el *wallet*' (p. 20, emphasis added). This enumeration reveals, once more, that the spheres very explicitly ascribed to English are above all those of cosmetics ('lipstick') and economics ('wallet'). So what Santos seems to be denouncing here, as in the previous story, is US economic imperialism, and the imposition of its cultural values on Puerto Ricans. Interestingly, English disappears from the text the moment the protagonists leave the trendy, US-fashion nightclub, to be replaced in the rest of the story by Puerto Rican idioms such as 'empinarse a lo macha' (to gulp down) and 'el traje que quería separar en la tienda' (where 'separar' means to lay away). With this alternance between a Spanish heavily influenced by English and a typically Puerto Rican idiom, Santos's stories are thus truly 'written in Puerto Rican'.

In 'Dulce pesadilla, Abnel', the only intrusion of English is the initial mention of the English graffiti that reads: 'Carmen y Caco forever'. Here English is used to satirise the romance mass-produced by pop songs, soap operas and Hollywood movies, which (as examined in chapter one) is shown to contrast so drastically with the protagonist's daily reality. Afterwards English disappears, and the rest of the text is strewn with colloquialisms and local idioms such as 'guagua' (bus), 'peseta' (twenty-five cent coin), or 'tapón' (traffic jam).

In these stories, anglicisms thus become markers of US-style consumerism, which is seen as tantamount to cultural assimilation. The purpose of English insertions is slightly different in 'Oso Blanco'. Here, if again an anglicised Spanish relates to economics (the work place) and cosmetics, it serves to emphasise the alienating nature of the US way-of-life. Only the beginning of the first section of the story, describing the female protagonist's daily journey to and from work, includes English terms such as 'parking', 'lipstick', 'tiempo récord', 'coffee break', which, combined with a style chiefly relying on the enumeration of daily, anodine actions, convey the monotony and dehumanising, alienating nature of modern life. English lexicon disappears from the moment monotony is broken, dispelled by the relationship the protagonist establishes with an inmate of the 'Oso Blanco' prison. This first section is initially characterised by enumeration and repetitions; in particular, the phrase 'carro verdemonte, viejo destartalado' becomes a leitmotiv. After the turning point, the narration centres on the relationship between the protagonist and the inmate, and the enumerations are replaced by ellipses. Even the recurring phrase ceases to convey boredom, as it undergoes various transformations

to turn into: 'la falda destartalada, verdemonte, la falda y su monte allí debajo, palpitando' in the final erotic climax (*El cuerpo correcto*, p. 31). In the second section, the same story is told from the point of view of the inmate. Here the style is characterised by a baroque, pseudo-scientific language, in the typical Latin American vein: 'De buenas a primeras, es decir, que un día como cualquier otro, mis dedos empezaron a tomar conciencia de sí mismos, desde las yemas a las uñas a los cartilages a la epidermis. Cada falange cobró vida independiente, cada carpo y metacarpo' (p. 38). The final section, told from the point of view of the prison itself, displays the features of traditional Caribbean story-telling: it is marked by orality and a play between the narrator and the reader, although the conventions of story-telling (presentation of the story-teller, set phrases to begin a tale, interaction between narrator and the audience) are subverted in this modern, written tale:

*Yo soy el oso mañoso que como cuerpos de presidio. Yo soy la estrella del circo, yo me convierto en ventanas, me convierto en barrotes, saco las tripas a veces, y soy un oso muy mago, un oso trapealista, un oso malabarero y un presidio y un penal. Nunca he podido comerme a nadie de afuera. Pero siempre hay una primera vez.*

*Había un brazo succulento y otro afuera que lo saludaba e intenté comerme a los dos. Ah, dirán ustedes, pero qué oso tan malo, qué oso sádico, cruel, fetichista. Como si ustedes no lo fueran, ustedes que leen las memorias del truco efectuado en las entrañas del oso mañoso...* (p. 49, emphasis added)

This polyphonic story thus marries Puerto Rican street language, literary tradition, and oral folk tale. It is 'written in Puerto Rican'.

But it is certainly in 'Hebra rota' that English lexicon and *calques* are most effectively used as signifiers of the imposition of the Anglo-Saxon model in all spheres of Puerto Rican society, and where this model is most explicitly perceived as alienating. Phrases and neologisms such as 'los primos de Kety's Beauty Parlor owner', 'el discount' (to designate a shop selling products at discount prices) or 'el que le jackeó el carro' (to hijack) signal the protagonists' assimilation to the US way of life and alienation from local culture, reflective of the evolution of Puerto Rican society at large. The beauty salon in particular, where the protagonists have their hair straightened, is always designated with the English term 'beauty', and the chemicals used by the beautician all bear foreign brand or generic names, mostly Anglo-Saxon. This detail is highly significant, given that hair-straightening in Santos's text stands for the cultural assimilation and psychological alienation of Afro-Puerto Ricans, as discussed at more length in the next chapter. That the chemicals should all be US-made, but for one which is Swedish, is revealing of the



fact that the Puerto Ricans' 'negrophobia' is extremely lucrative for Western, especially metropolitan, industries.

In the second part of the story, when hair straightening is taking place, the intrusion of English increases considerably, resulting in a hybrid prose which mirrors the protagonist's thoughts: 'Ella se sabe de tips y de ammonias para decolorar y sabe de paquetes multivitamínicos y que los champús de Porosity Control dan caspa' (p. 68), 'Se abre un frasco de Hair Relaxer without Lye de Easystyle Products' (p. 69), 'pintados de rojo Auburn Copper' (p. 71), and so on. The influence of English on Santos's language is not simply lexical, but (as in Vega's 'Pollito chicken') it spreads to the syntax, thereby capturing contemporary Puerto Rican speech. Thus the sentence '[el] padre que llega a la calle tropezando, que le grita, a quien ella le *grita para atrás*, que la persigue para darle y la agarra por el cuello ...' (p. 67, emphasis added) reproduces an anglicism commonly heard in Puerto Rico, modelled on the phrase 'to shout back'. This anglicised Spanish is combined with Puerto Rican idioms, slang and colloquialisms, such as 'pasas encaracolás' (p. 67), or 'cantos estiraos y cantos acaracolaos' (p. 70).

Besides this alternance between Spanglish and *boricua*, here again Santos resorts to enumerations and repetitions: 'Una espera su turno, espera el atardecer, *espera que* nadie note las pasas y la nariz descarriada, espera la peinilla sudoroso al rojo vivo, espera el rito de carimbo...' (p. 66, emphasis added). Most of all, Santos relies on irony, as transpires, for instance, from the semantic shift that operates in 'espera' in the previous quotation. But nowhere is this irony more evident than in the use of a poetic, grandiloquent language that debunks the protagonist's dreams of beauty, as in Yetsaida's prayer: 'Oh, diosa del pelo sano, santa protectora del brillo y humedad de las hebras cabelludas, de los folículos proteínicos, porosos, líbrame de sudar porque ahí se acaba el sueño. Si sudo, las pasas retornarán a su cauce' (p. 66).

Santos thus succeeds in elaborating a hybrid, creolised prose more representative of the linguistic reality of Puerto Rico than the work of *casticistas*. Yet the specific function ascribed to English in her fiction conveys the author's reservations towards the US cultural and social domination implied in such linguistic practices. If *mestizaje* is portrayed in an ambivalent light, however, it is not out of a fear of cultural emasculation of Puerto Rico. Rather, this ambivalence reflects the fact that *mestizaje* is fraught with socio-political implications, as the creolisation process relies on the (neo)colonial relationship of the island with the US.

On the other hand, creolisation is truly celebrated in the fiction of the Guadeloupeans Sylviane Telchid and Gisèle Pineau. Here, however, linguistic *métissage* is not necessarily part of the *corriente antimachista* as it is in Puerto Rico: ample attestation to this is the French Caribbean movement of *créolité*. As mentioned in the introduction, the *créolistes* see the storyteller, or *conteur*, as the founder of Creole culture. What is problematic, is that in their formulation the figure of the storyteller is almost invariably male. As Arnold remarks, here again the *créolistes* exclude women from the process of the elaboration of a national identity.<sup>46</sup> Throughout the Caribbean, women have always played a major role in the oral transmission of culture, and storytelling in particular was often a female activity. For most writers of the area, including Nobel Laureates Gabriel García Márquez and Derek Walcott, it is the childhood storytelling of the mother, grandmother, an aunt or any other *female* relative or next of kin that accounts for their training as writers. Paule Marshall and Edwidge Danticat likewise pay homage to their mother, while Gisèle Pineau acknowledges the profound influence of her grandmother. Afro-American writing displays the same characteristic, and Alice Walker makes it the very basis of her own type of cultural feminism, womanism. Creole is therefore not simply the mother tongue of Antilleans, but also a *mothertongue*, the vehicle of a culture whose survival was until recently primarily ensured by women.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, as Ina Césaire explains to Suzanne Houyoux in an interview, while both men and women tell stories, there has traditionally been a division of roles. Storytelling in public occasions has been reserved for men, and private storytelling has been a predominantly female activity. She comments:

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<sup>46</sup> 'C'est lui [le conteur] le seul producteur de littérature audible, une littérature articulée dans l'ethno-texte de la parole, et qui, dans la parole, se forge un langage soumis aux ambivalences de la créolisation, à l'opacité du Détour pour survivre, et à l'inédit insoupçonné de la culture créole', (*Lettres créoles*, op. cit., p. 41, emphasis added). Gisèle Pineau and Sylviane Telchid both expressed their feeling (in interviews granted respectively on 6 January 1998 and 29 April 1999) that Schwarz-Bart's pioneering prose, for instance, did not earn her full recognition.

<sup>47</sup> Susheila Nasta uses this spelling in 'Motherlands, Mothercultures, Mothertongues: Women's Writing in the Caribbean' (in *Shades of Empire in Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature*, ed. by C.C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, Rodopi B.V., 1993, pp. 211-220), and *Motherlands: Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, London: Women's Press, 1991.

Vous savez à l'occasion d'une veillée funéraire, les femmes font le service; elles ont quarante ou cinquante personnes à nourrir toute la nuit. D'autre part, le père, quand il rentre le soir des champs de canne, il mange et se couche; il est trop fatigué pour raconter des histoires. Il y a peut-être autre chose que de simples contingences matérielles mais ce n'est pas sûr (p. 356).

Despite this division of gender roles, what is highly revealing is that the *créolistes* should imagine the archetype of the founder of the regional culture as a *father* figure, thereby only acknowledging public, male storytelling. This minimises the contribution of the Caribbean woman in the emergence of a local culture: as Arnold puts it, the *conteur* 'thus becomes the gendered ancestor of all creole culture' ('The Gendering of *créolité*', p. 30). Thus ironically, it is men – who until at least the 1950s had exclusive though limited opportunities of 'escaping' creolisation via education, power and emigration (that is, via an access to the 'white world', which women were virtually denied) – who are now envisaged as the primary founders of Creole culture. Vera Kutzinski likewise notes how across the region '[the] homoerotic masculinist paradigm [of Caliban nowhere acknowledges] women, let alone nonwhite women, as cultural producers' ('The Cult of Caliban', p. 288). More crucially perhaps, such a vision marginalises and even silences the woman writer, for in this oral society the storyteller is the ancestor of the writer. The woman writer is thus deprived of her historicity, her function being envisaged as exclusively male.<sup>48</sup>

Simone Schwarz-Bart was among the first to challenge this eviction of women from cultural production in her fiction. As Smyley Wallace shows, the metaphor land/woman is pivotal to *Pluie et vent*. Since Creole culture is in turn rooted in the land, Schwarz-Bart's text thereby establishes a strong connection between women and Creole culture.<sup>49</sup> Several other women writers of the 1990s have likewise sought to create a nation language while reinstating women as cultural producers. The Guadeloupean Sylviane Telchid sets out to enhance the status of Creole in her fiction, either by writing directly in Creole, as in *Ti Chika*, or by writing in a French

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<sup>48</sup> None of the writing of Confiant or Glissant features a female storyteller (Glissant's Papa Longoué and Mathieu are two versions of the *conteur*). The same is true of Chamoiseau's first two novels. In *Chronique des sept misères*, the narrator speaks in the name of the *djobeurs*, who are all men. *Solibo Magnifique* focuses on the *conteur* Solibo, envisaged as the father of the community. If the author attempts to rectify such gender bias with Marie-Sophie Laborieux in *Texaco*, the first part of the novel is narrated virtually directly by her father, while paradoxically his female story-teller is 'masculinised', described as 'négresse à deux graines' (with two balls). So for Chamoiseau too, story-telling is a male prerogative.

<sup>49</sup> See Smyley Wallace, *op.cit.* On the land and Creole culture, see Dany Bébel-Gisler's *Le Défi culturel guadeloupéen: devenir ce que nous sommes*, Paris: Editions caribéennes, 1989.

suffused with Creole lexicon and syntax, as in *Throvia de la Dominique*.<sup>50</sup> One of Telchid's merits in *Throvia* is that by mixing a creolised French with Creole, she avoids reproducing the conventional linguistic hierarchy between a high language (French) restricted to serious literary matters and superior characters, and a vernacular (Creole) that would be reserved for the comic element. Instead, as in Roumain and Schwarz-Bart, her creolised style permeates the narrative, which helps to institute Creole as a literary language.

Creole impregnates the French of *Throvia* in various ways and to varying degrees, ranging from the most conspicuous to the most subtle. One method she uses is the insertion of Creole lexicon followed by a translation in a footnote, or else by a paraphrasing sentence in French. Thus a Creole idiom drawing on the imagery of the game of dominos is subsequently clarified by a comment in brackets: 'Il y avait déjà un bout de temps que le double-six était mort dans sa main (tout ça pour te dire qu'elle avait coiffé Sainte-Catherine depuis bien longtemps)' (p. 65). Often these Creole insertions are not accompanied by any translation or typographical marker, which achieves a greater fusion of the two languages, as can be assessed in the following examples: '[elles] passèrent ensuite le plus clair de leur temps à driver dans les champs' (p. 36), or 'elle remercia ces deux bons vieux-corps' (p. 41). Here the meaning of 'driver' (to drift, wander), or 'vieux-corps' (elderly) is to be inferred from the context.

Secondly Telchid resorts to the technique of transposition. This occurs most often in dialogues or indirect speech, where the style mirrors the characters' speech patterns. For instance, an extract from a dialogue reads: 'Père Ben, pourquoi un *bel* garçon comme toi, *c'est l'abbé tu es allé faire?*' (p. 58, italics added), rather than standard French 'Père Ben, vous qui êtes si beau garçon, pourquoi avez-vous décidé de devenir prêtre?' Similarly, Telchid transposes expressions such as 'tout partout' from the Creole *tou patou*, instead of standard French 'partout', or 'un lot de', from the Creole *on lo*, for 'beaucoup de'. In the dialogue: 'Mes enfants, *je suis mêlée comme cendre et farine*, venez me démêler. Qu'est-ce que vous *achetez dans ma main?*' (p. 13, emphasis added), the author transposes the Creole expression *mwen mélé kon sann é farin* (I am broke), as well as modelling the phrase 'acheter dans ma main' from Creole. Some of the expressions and proverbs transposed into French

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<sup>50</sup> Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996.

would remain hermetic to a French audience without further clarification: thus 'toutes ses patates douces avaient perdu leurs tiges rampantes' (p. 41), is translated by the footnote 'elle avait perdu tout espoir'.

Thirdly, numerous creolisms (that is to say, lexicon or syntax correct in Creole but semantically different or ungrammatical in French) permeate the text. In 'ceux qu'on crie "Négropolitains" pour se moquer d'eux' (p. 46), for instance, 'crier' does not have the standard French meaning of 'to shout' or 'to scream', but the Creole meaning of 'to call', 'to name'. In 'les portes [...] se fermaient *vitement*' (p. 70), on the other hand, 'vitement' is incorrect in French, but not in Creole. Another creolism found in the novel is the phrase 'pas ... encore' to mean 'no longer', which in standard French would be 'ne ... plus', 'pas encore' meaning 'not yet'. In other cases, she uses a Creole word with a close French equivalent but whose suffix is only correct in Creole, such as 'tourmenterie' (p. 16); this device was already used by Schwarz-Bart.

Another typical feature of Creole that Telchid transposes into French is compound nouns. These can be divided into two categories. Firstly, nouns whose two components are actually redundant, as in 'franche-vérité' (p. 9). Secondly, words that are in fact an adjunction of several nouns 'deux-mots-quatre-baisers' (p. 10), often without the articles, partitives, genitives or prepositions that would have been expected in standard French, as in 'saison-Carême' (p. 9), 'bancs-feignants' (p. 31), or 'personnes-Guadeloupe' (p. 98) – this last phrase being the exact calque of the Creole *moun Gwadeloup*, meaning Guadeloupeans. Such a feature is actually not restricted to nouns: it is found with adverbs too, as in 'vitement-dépêché' (p. 12). These compound nouns and adverbs convey the rhythm of Creole speech, reproducing its concision.

Furthermore, some linguistic features specific to Creole are applied to French. A good illustration is the use of 'même', an emphatic Creole interjection derived from the French adverb *même* (as in *quand même*) and best rendered in English by 'very' or 'really'. In: 'On te fait partir? Tu pars. Mais tu trouves un canot qui te ramène une fois même' (p. 43), for instance, the expression 'une fois même' could translate as 'right away', 'même' increasing the notion of haste contained in 'une fois'. Similarly, in: 'Ne va pas chez les quimboiseurs nouvelle vague, ils ne sont pas bons même, même, même' (p. 75), the repetition adds intensity, to mean '[not] at all'. As evidenced in this last example, Telchid also draws from Creole the emphatic

repetition of adjectives or adverbs. This device reaches comic proportions in story-telling: 'Cette femme, grande, grande, grande, maigre, maigre, maigre, blanche à en paraître translucide' (p. 60). The expression 'cette enfant-là' (p. 103) likewise reproduces a feature of Creole speech, where 'là' does not function to distinguish 'cette enfant-là' from 'cette enfant-ci', but is purely redundant: standard French would have simply said 'cette enfant'.

Telchid also transcribes a number of Creole interjections, such as 'alors': 'Tu ne sais pas alors, que les hommes sont des fruits-à-pain, quand ils tombent, ils sont finis' (p. 39). Another example is 'on': 'C'est pas lui [le Bondieu] qui est le maître de toutes choses on?' (p. 83). Both interjections are used in interrogations to indicate a certain degree of surprise, indignation or annoyance on the part of the enunciator. Onomatopoeia is a final way in which Creole leaves its imprint on Telchid's text. There are numerous occurrences of it, such as: '[les] têtes des dormeurs, qui parfois se cognaient bok!' (p. 38), or 'le car entier rit kra kra kra' (p. 39), or even 'elle ne fit que le larguer blip' (p. 87), 'blip' suggesting a quick and sudden action.

Together with interjections and onomatopoeia, the use of the second person singular in the narrative confers orality on the text. The narrative voice switches abruptly from third to second person, as if the narrator suddenly materialised and addressed the reader directly: 'Petite et grassouillette, elle débordait d'énergie et allait d'un bout à l'autre de la salle avec la légèreté de l'oiseau fufou. Son entrain décuplait ton énergie, sa chaleur te descendait tout droit dans le coeur' (pp. 8-9). This sudden materialisation of the narrator recalls, of course, the convention whereby the storyteller concludes the tale with a phrase that explains how s/he arrived in front of the audience to tell them the story.

Finally, imagery and proverbs play a most important role in Telchid's elaboration of a creolised text. Even common French expressions such as 'une cage à lapin', 'le chant du coq', or 'faire une salade' are replaced by Creole equivalent such as 'une caloge à poules' (p. 17), 'le chant de l'oiseau sucrier' (p. 28), 'faire une soupe-à-Congo' (p. 15). As for the imagery, it draws on the local flora and fauna, so that, even without landscape descriptions, the text constantly evokes the Caribbean: 'Aussi vivement que la Marie-Honteuse derrière ses feuilles, Pétrolina cacha sa pudeur en émoi sous ses paupières' (p. 7), or 'Pareil aux racines du figuier-maudit, le chômage étendait ses ramifications d'un bout à l'autre de la Dominique' (p. 8). Some imagery reflects the Creole psychology, as in the following example where

life is animated and seen as treacherous: 'Elle m'aide de toutes ses forces à supporter les *croche-pieds de la vie*' (p. 7, emphasis added). The same personalisation or animation of an abstract concept is found in the following metaphor: 'cette angoisse qui, tel un chatrou, s'agrippait à son estomac' (p. 41). Standard French is thus systematically challenged, undermined, adapted to a Caribbean reality. In a metaphor such as 'des économies aussi étiées que vache Grande-Terre en saison-Carême', creolisation is achieved at two levels, first in the simile itself, whose full understanding requires a knowledge of the topography and climate of Guadeloupe, and secondly in the language, since the omission of articles and partitives reproduces Creole speech.

As in Schwarz-Bart, the numerous proverbs, most of which are inserted in the narrative, are directly transposed from Creole. Many are part of the narrative, such as: 'L'anoli ne peut que donner que le peu de sang qu'elle a, pas vrai?' (p. 11); 'chacun savait que dans les situations difficiles une main ne peut se laver sans l'autre' (p. 50; from the proverb *sé yon lanmen ka lavé lot*); or 'Le cabri fait des crottes en pillules, ce n'est pas pour autant qu'il est pharmacien' (p. 71). Other proverbs are inserted in interior monologues or dialogues. Thus Pétrolina reflects: 'La deveine est une femme folle, elle frappe n'importe où, n'importe comment' (p. 27: once more there is a personalisation of abstract concepts); or even 'On n'a jamais vu la rivière remonter à sa source, n'est-ce pas? Alors, il ne servait à rien de regretter l'absence d'un défunt' (p. 28); or she tells her man: 'Colosse, dans une calebasse, il n'y a que deux couis, alors à toi de choisir' (p. 88). As for Throvia, she reflects: 'le ravet n'a jamais eu raison devant la poule' (p. 48). Here, as Schwarz-Bart does in *Pluie et vent*, Telchid draws on the Creole subtext, allowing her to say more than what is actually spelt out. The full proverb says *ravèt pa ni rézon douvan poul. Tèlman i sav i pa ni rézon, i ka obliyé i ni zèl!* (The cockroach facing the hen is always in the wrong. So much so that it does not think of flying away). By recalling this proverb, the text suggests that the situation that Throvia is facing (expulsion because of her illegal immigrant status) is actually an injustice. At the same time, it implicitly states that French law never favours the weak, in this case the Guadeloupeans (or other Dominican or Haitian immigrants) who are steeped in the oral Creole culture and are largely illiterate in French.

Telchid thus succeeds in elaborating an *écriture métissée* in *Throvia*. What is more, this linguistic *métissage* is shown in the text to originate mostly from women.

The novel thereby presents women as cultural producers and transmitters. Indeed, because the author/narrator and main characters of the novel are female, this culture passed on through proverbial wisdom is naturally associated with women in the text. In fact, there is a sharp contrast between the female and male characters regarding their attitude to and use of language. Pétrolina's own attitude towards language and culture is ambivalent: although she is primarily Creolophone (p. 15), she insists that her children speak English at home (p. 16, p. 76). That the custom is gradually lost attests to the artificiality of the measure. So Pétrolina, like many Caribbean women, clearly values the official language and culture, for she understands that they are key to social mobility.

Yet not all Caribbean women are shown as upholders of the official culture and language in the novel. Pétrolina's attitude contrasts with that of Throvia's schoolmistresses, obvious fictional *alter egos* of the author herself. These adopt a very different stance towards their dual heritage and find another way to accommodate the diglossic predicament of the island. Indeed, they use Creole as the foundation on which to build the children's learning of French, which when they start school is to them a foreign language. Significantly, the teachers' approach to bilingual education is justified by a Creole saying: 'La Parole dit: "Quand le petit chat a perdu sa mère, il tête la chienne". Alors les maîtresses n'eurent plus qu'une chose à faire, laisser les enfants libres d'utiliser leurs éperons naturels. Mieux, elles s'en servirent: la classe se fit donc en créole d'abord et le français, à pas prudents, fit son entrée dans le petit poulailler' (p. 16; this extract makes a passing reference to a second proverb: *kréyòl sé zépon natirèl an nou*). Even when women are defenders of what is official, like Pétrolina, their role is ambivalent, since along with a respect for the official culture, they transmit Creole culture to their children. That Pétrolina, who communicates with her children primarily in Creole, passes on Creole wisdom to Throvia is clear when, for instance, the latter recalls a proverb that she has often heard from her mother: 'Le cabri libre dans la savane ignore ce que souffre le cabri attaché' (p. 46).

The Guadeloupean socio-linguist Dany Bébel-Gisler notes the traditional association between Creole language and the womb. She quotes the Creole saying:



*kréyòl sé grenn vant an nou* (literally Creole is the seed of our womb, which she broadly translates as '[le créole, c'est] notre patrie intérieure').<sup>51</sup> She then explains:

Logée dans la 'matrice existentielle', la langue créole fait partie intégrante de nous-mêmes, est constitutive de notre découverte du monde et des autres, 'lieu et milieu donc d'une appartenance coprorele et d'une communication' (*Le défi culturel guadeloupéen*, p. 23).

Later she reports how the Creole saying *pawòl vant* (literally, 'words of the womb') means 'essential words' (p. 107). Although Bébel-Gisler does not comment on this aspect, it is significant that all the images used to express the relationship to Creole language should refer to the relationship to the mother. Women – and here it should be remembered that the primarily Creolophone sector of Francophone Caribbean societies is largely matrifocal – are thus seen to play a pre-eminent role in the transmission and production of Creole language and culture in these sayings. The vision of the role played by women in the cultural process that transpires from the Creole popular tradition is thus radically different from that of the *créolistes*, who envisage the male story-teller as the nearly exclusive progenitor of French Caribbean culture.<sup>52</sup>

Telchid's text certainly reinforces this close association between women and Creole language and culture, if only implicitly. Indeed, neither of the major male characters, Colosse and Burton, is shown as an important producer of Creole speech – and, by extension, of Creole culture – in the novel. Colosse is particularly laconic, so there is hardly any direct or indirect transcription of his language in the novel. The one time he is seen to use a proverb 'les affaires du cabri ne sont pas celles du mouton' (p. 81), the reader later finds out that he did not actually utter those words, but that these were a product of Throvia's imagination (in a nightmare). So here it is actually a female character who is associating Colosse with a proverb. All the other sayings and proverbs associated with Colosse are reported by the narrative voice.

Like Colosse, Burton acts as a father figure for Throvia (being, like her, Dominican), but his is more the role of a spiritual father. He is for her a mine of knowledge on Dominica and Guadeloupe. Yet, here again, Burton is not so much

<sup>51</sup> In *Le défi culturel guadeloupéen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>52</sup> This implicit association of Creole primarily with the mother is further reflected in Bébel-Gisler, when an interlocutor comments: 'Ma référence, pour une véritable expression du créole, serait ma mère, ma grand-mère, mon grand-père [note that the mother and grandmother come first]. Quand j'ai entendu qu'on allait enseigner le créole à l'Université et que ce ne serait pas ma mère, ou la tienne, qui enseignerait, je me suis mis à rire' (*Le défi culturel guadeloupéen*, p. 31).

associated with the Creole culture as with the official culture, since he acts as Throvia's informal English teacher (p. 73). That Burton's culture belongs more to the written word is clear in the story he once tells Throvia, about slaves buried by their masters after digging a hole to hide their treasure. The French used in this story – flawless, like Burton's English – is very standard: 'Après l'esclavage et pendant des années, il s'est passé des faits inquiétants sur l'habitation. Des animaux tombaient malades sans raison, des épidémies décimaient les troupeaux. Des ouvriers qu'on avait vus la veille forts et bien portants mouraient subitement...' (p. 74). Significantly, too, the information Burton is disclosing is about the white, official world: so that this world is mostly associated with men in the novel.

By contrast, although Throvia also practices English with her mother Pétrolina, it is clear that their natural means of communication is Creole; indeed, after living in Guadeloupe for ten years, Throvia finds that she can hardly speak English. So all the dialogues in creolised French in the novel are actually meant to be carried out in Creole, since French is a foreign language to Pétrolina, as it was to her children on their arrival in Guadeloupe. As the text explains, Pétrolina never had any communication problem in Guadeloupe because she communicates primarily in Creole. Her elder children, on the other hand, faced enormous difficulties at school, because French is the language of instruction. So Pétrolina's world is predominantly that of the oral, Creole cultures common to Dominica and Guadeloupe. Significantly, the novel opens on an episode of storytelling, where the storyteller is Pétrolina and the audience Throvia, eager to hear how her parents met. Thus while collective wisdom is passed down through proverbs, the family history is passed down through stories. In either case, the communication is shown to be ensured through the bond between mother and daughter. In this respect, it is also interesting to note the ending of the novel. Pétrolina and her youngest two children are expelled from Guadeloupe because of their illegal status. What is significant about the episode, however, is the context of Pétrolina's expulsion: it is a written act that triggers it, a letter sent by an envious neighbour to the authorities. The importance that the written word takes on for these primarily oral communities is underlined when the neighbourhood recognises the gravity of such a gesture: 'Écrire! Awa! Si la parole, c'est du vent, l'écrit ça laisse des traces. Il y a des jeux à ne pas faire' (p. 90). The text thus seems to signify that Pétrolina's world and culture are endangered by the official world, not only in legal terms, but in cultural terms too.

Here it is also worth noting that Throvia, originally expelled with her mother, manages to survive in the official world (she returns to Guadeloupe to pursue her studies) precisely because of her determination to master both of her official cultures (those of French and English) while remaining attached to the unofficial, Creole one (notably through her relationship with her mother).

Women are thus implicitly portrayed as major – if not the primary – producers of Creole language and culture in Telchid's novel. This challenges the male *créolistes*'s representation of the *conteur* as invariably male. While herself producing a Creole prose, Pineau likewise reinstates Caribbean women in their role of *conteuses* in her fiction.

Whereas Telchid's prose derives from natural French Caribbean speech, Gisèle Pineau follows Roumain and Schwarz-Bart in the elaboration of a creolised literary language that does not correspond to any reality, what Glissant would call *littérature orale*. Her prose is an artificial creation which does not simply *transcribe*, but rather *captures the essence of* local speech.<sup>53</sup> Pineau's technique is similar to Roumain's, but instead of forging her language out of obsolete French dialects, she uses modern popular (even colloquial) French as the stuff of her narration, only sporadically drawing on French dialect lexicon. Thus in the opening of *L'Espérance-macadam*:

Restait rien de bon. Que des immondices. Y avait même pas une planche debout, une tôle en place. Vestiges de cases. Souvenirs de chemins qui perçaient au cœur de Savane. Y avait plus ni ramage ni plumage aux bras cassés des arbres tombés à genoux (p. 9).

Pineau's elaboration of a personal, literary voice was progressive. Her first short stories ('Paroles de terre en larmes', 'Ombres créoles', 'Léna'<sup>54</sup>), are for the most part written in standard French. The influence of Creole, however, is felt on two levels. Firstly on a purely lexical level, with the repeated injection of idioms that belong to Caribbean French or Creole, such as 'case' (hut, house), 'morne' (hill), 'traces' (lanes), 'pitt à coqs' (cock fight), or 'au pipirit chantant' (when the cock is singing, i.e., at dawn), all commonly found in contemporary French Caribbean writers. Secondly, through abundant imagery Pineau adds a Creole ring to her text written in standard French. Whereas Telchid's style is marked by Creole proverbs,

<sup>53</sup> Telchid's *Throvia de la Dominique* addresses a teenage public, whereas the works by Pineau discussed here are meant for adults, which may account for her more elaborate style.

<sup>54</sup> All three published in *Paroles de terre en larmes*, *op. cit.*

Pineau's prose rests upon numerous images that refer to a Caribbean reality. These creolise the text, not simply because of their Caribbean referent, but also because Creole is a much more metaphorical language than French. In 'Paroles de terre en larmes', for instance, Félicie talks about 'la petite *plage* qui bordait mon nombril' and 'la *mangrove* de ma chevelure' (p. 6, emphasis added), where both *plage* and *mangrove* allude to Caribbean topography. Félicie's sister Irène likewise compares men to crabs: 'Les hommes ici sont comme des crabes blancs qui fouillent des trous dans la terre. Chaque trou est une nouvelle femme, chaque trou est une conquête...' (p. 14). In some cases, such similes enhance the gap between Metropolitan France and Guadeloupe. Thus Félicie tells her lover who is about to join de Gaulle's rebel troops in Europe: 'La guerre, là-bas, c'est un pitt à coqs', and she adds further 'De Gaulle! C'est un mancillinier, vas-y dans son ombrage et attends voir la pluie...' (p. 9, the *mancillinier* is a poisonous tree).

But it is certainly with her novel *La Grande drive des esprits*<sup>55</sup> that Pineau first succeeds in elaborating a truly Creole voice, culminating in her second novel, *L'Espérance-macadam*. In addition to the abundant imagery noted in her early fiction, Pineau's language chiefly relies on creolised French, although Creole does not suffuse her writing to the same degree as in Roumain. The distinct lexical source Pineau draws upon in order to forge her language largely accounts for this difference. While she resorts to modern colloquial or popular French, Roumain's neologisms derive from the French dialects that provided the bulk of Creole lexicon, which automatically confers a Creole resonance to his prose. As in many *créolistes*, Pineau's prose is marked by both *créolité* and *oralité*. Thus, many of the devices observed in Telchid's novel are also found in *La Grande drive des esprits* and *L'Espérance-macadam*. These two novels, far more than the earlier short stories, are punctuated by words and expressions directly transposed from Creole. The most frequently found are 'case', 'manman' and 'granman', (for the standard French *maman* and *grand-mère*), 'au mitan de' (already used by Roumain), 'un brin de' and 'un lot de' (transposed from the Creole *on bwen* and its antonym *on lo*, literally 'a lot of'), 'nul côté' (from *pon koté*, 'nowhere', instead of standard French *nulle part*), 'pied-bois' (from *pié-bwa*, 'tree', in standard French *arbre*), or the redundant phrase 'en dedans de', for the standard French *dans*. The author also borrows sporadically

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<sup>55</sup> Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 1993.

from obsolete French, as in the simile: 'Je me sentis pareille au marron traqué qui forlonge la meute' (p. 42), where the allusion to the hunt of runaway slaves, or maroons, juxtaposed with the unusual, outdated term 'forlonge' recreates a Creole linguistic subtext.

Unlike the earlier fiction, though, most of the imagery found in Pineau's first two novels contains some degree of creolisation and/or orality. For instance, in the following description of the effects of World War Two on Guadeloupe, the colloquialism of the imagery conveys a certain tone of orality: 'L'Europe pétait et ses gaz, poussés par les alizés, empestaient l'air de nos contrées' (*La Grande drive des esprits*, p. 127). A mother's sympathy for her son is described in this way: 'les pleurs du garçon firent sauter son cœur dans sa poitrine plus vivement qu'une viande roussie dans un vieux canari' (p. 19). Here the Creole term *canari* (or cooking pot) and the very nature of the imagery (whose culinary reference in such a pathetic moment produces a comic effect) recalls the style of Caribbean story-telling. On one occasion, Man Boniface's laughter is compared to that of a gambler losing a *grenndé* game: 'Man Boniface riait fort, à la façon d'un joueur de grenndé qui vient de perdre son dernier sou dans un coup de malchance' (*La Grande drive des esprits*, p. 23). There are more of these striking similes in *L'Espérance-macadam*: 'Si j'avais été jeune', Éliette claims, 'j'aurais couru jusqu'à Savane pour fuir cette rue de Ravine-Guinée où les pensées sortaient comme des crabes de leurs trous et me montaient dessus' (p. 24). In another passage a character reflects 'que l'existence était une geôle profonde et les Nègres des crabes basculés dans une barrique sans rédemption' (p. 58). The orality of most of these similes is enhanced by their insertion in free indirect speech.

On the lexical level, Pineau's style can therefore be described as a mixture of standard French, creolised French, colloquial modern French and dated French. The same influences can be felt on the syntax, as illustrated in: 'Jadis, les bouches disaient l'esprit. On ne regardait ni sensibilité ni susceptibilité. On aimait donner des ti noms pour redéfinir les personnes' (*La Grande drive des esprits*, p. 13). Here the phrases 'les bouches *disaient l'esprit*' (which literally translates as to speak one's mind in English, but has no such direct equivalent in French), 'des ti noms', (which in standard French would be *petits noms* or *surnoms*, nicknames), and 'les personnes', instead of the standard *les gens*, combined with the unusual, dated syntax of 'On ne regardait ni sensibilité ni susceptibilité' all denote creolisation. The

same devices are at work in *L'Espérance-macadam*: 'Même si une autre mémoire lui avait rapporté tous les souvenirs qu'elle amassait pour s'étourdir les jours de solitude et louer Dieu de l'avoir laissée réchapper vive de ce cyclone tant raide' (*L'Espérance-macadam*, pp. 218-219). Here again Pineau's prose blends standard French, a somewhat dated French ('réchapper vive') with creolised French ('tant raide'). As mentioned previously, *oralité* and *créolité* are nevertheless generally restricted to interior monologues. Although these abound in Pineau's novels, in the third-person narrative, unlike in Roumain and Schwarz-Bart, the language tends to be more conventional.

Yet, like Schwarz-Bart and Telchid, Pineau reinstates women in their role as storytellers in her fiction. The three short stories mentioned above are all narrated by women, in the first person. So it is to them that the Creole voice is explicitly attributed. Female narrators also largely predominate in *La Grande drive des esprits*. The primary narrator is the nameless photographer. She obtains her information from secondary narrators who, apart from Léonce, are all women: Barnabé, Célestina, and Ninette. More significantly perhaps, the very structure of the work is informed by these female narrators. The novel is divided into two parts, the first entitled 'Le temps d'aller' and the second 'Le temps de virer'. This structure actually replicates Ninette's words (or thoughts): 'elle savait depuis longtemps que *s'il y avait un aller, le virer existait aussi*' (p. 100). So not only is the written word shown to be grounded in, as well as structured by, a Creole proverb, it also appears to emanate directly from a female character. Furthermore, the photographer is the only character to know the entire story of the novel, and thus the only one to be able to piece together the full family history of Myrtha and Léonce, thereby reconstituting the family tree of Célestina. Ninette and the female photographer are thus truly envisaged as the producers of the novel.

Similarly, Éliette and Rosette are the main narrators of *L'Espérance-Macadam*, and Séraphine, Angela, and Anoncia are the secondary ones. The sole male narrator, and only for a few pages towards the very end of the novel, is Rosan. That the novel should have been engendered by several *conteuses* is visible in some of the imagery, which, especially in the passages centring on Éliette, frequently emanates from the kitchen. Thus Éliette, trapped in her memories, comments: 'ces enfants-là qui entraient tout seuls dans mes pensées, pareils à des vers dans les cosses de pois-du-bois' (p. 27). She also refers to these persistent memories as: 'visions pendues en

dedans de mon âme, casseroles mal récurées, fesses noires de fumée, mémoire égarée' (p. 72). Later on, she reflects: 'si le Bon Dieu pouvait me donner une seule rallonge de vie, je resterais pas engeôlée ici-dans à mettre du ti-bois pour garder vif le feu de ma douleur' (pp. 297-298: here the imagery borrows from the two eminently female activities of sewing and cooking).

As for Rosette, she is explicitly depicted as a storyteller in the novel: she began to comfort Rosan with her tales full of hope and love. Later, it is Angela who becomes her primary listener. As mentioned in chapter one, Rosette uses her imagination as the material for dictations for Angela: 'Rosette donnait à Angela une dictée de son invention, longue comme un conte. Elle avait toujours cette habitude de puiser dans ses rêves. Et Angela écrivait, docile, sur des feuilles volantes que sa manman rassemblait ensuite dans son armoire, sans jamais les relire...' (p. 199). Through her storytelling, Rosette is thus able to comfort herself and her family, as well as to unriddle her creativity, while at the same time nurturing her bond with her daughter and passing her philosophy of life onto her. Whereas Rosette invents the stories, it is Angela who writes them down: here the author could be paying homage to her own literary foremothers, the storytellers of her childhood, in particular her grandmother, to whom she paid tribute in *L'exil selon Julia*.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, though, the emphasis is on the oral: if Rosette's stories are written down, nobody ever reads them, and in the opening of the novel, the sheets on which they were diligently copied have been scattered away by the hurricane. A pessimistic ending for the product of Rosette's imagination that may be intended to point to the fact that these tales do not have an entirely positive effect: by making Rosette oblivious of reality, they created the necessary conditions for an incestuous relationship to develop between Rosan and Angela. Yet the text shows the greater danger for the female characters in not speaking up, not passing on their (real) story. Silence is indeed far more damaging, as attested by the cases of Anoncia and Séraphine, whose secret poisons their lives, and of Angela, who suffers years of incest. Thus, not only does Pineau (like Telchid) reinstate Caribbean women as storytellers in her fiction, but she further urges them to speak up.

Telchid and Pineau turn the linguistic complexity of the region into an advantage: they succeed in elaborating an *écriture métissée*, a hybrid language with

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<sup>56</sup> Paris: Stock, 1996.

countless possibilities of invention. Their linguistic project thereby coincides with those of the male *créolistes* and of Puerto Rican writers such as Sánchez, Vega and Santos. Yet the fiction of the two Guadeloupean authors also breaks the silence around women's participation in the elaboration of French Caribbean culture commonly found in their male counterparts. In this respect, their linguistic project is more appropriately compared with that of the Puerto Rican *corriente anti-machista* including the three authors mentioned above. Despite the very different linguistic contexts of Puerto Rico and the Francophone Caribbean, the hybrid writing of Mayra Santos, Sylviane Telchid and Gisèle Pineau therefore achieves similar ends. The analysis of Ana Luz García's prose will show an alternative to linguistic hybridity in elaborating an *anti-machista* language.

### Encoding difference: Ana Luz García's *Minimal son*

In *Minimal son*, Ana Luz García Calzada experiments with the musical avant-garde movement of minimalism and the *son*, both resting on the technique of repeating a given theme with endless variations.<sup>57</sup> While minimalism points to a global cultural heritage – born in the US but inspired by the French composer Erik Satie, it borrows from Balinese, African and Indian musical traditions – the *son* is a popular music originating from Oriente province, in which the singer improvises around a motif made up of a few set phrases. The combination of the two in the title signals that the author's approach to universal culture is rooted in her Cubanness. The chapters of the novel centre on a series of interior monologues, each focusing on one of the seven protagonists and alternating between third person narrative and free indirect speech. The comprehension of the passages in free indirect speech, however, is somewhat hindered by the abrupt switches from the first to the second person, as in the following example: 'Cada vez más alto y frío, cada vez más tortuosa la serpiente de cemento que lo lleva sabe Dios a qué, Emilia, Emilia, siempre me trajiste mala suerte. Sandra dice que *eso de llevarte a Alisio no sirve*, pero creo que es la única forma' (p. 19; Sandra's words, reproduced by Diego, have been italicised).

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<sup>57</sup> Aida Bonelly de Díaz likewise draws on the classical music technique of variation in *Variaciones* (Santo Domingo: Taller, 1986, 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1984).



Between the chapters are inserted sketches written in a very experimental, hermetic language that seems to emerge straight from the characters' subconscious, at times reading like accounts of dreams or delirium, at times imitating the style of children's rhymes and tales. In the first part of the novel, the action is obscured by the equally hermetic style of the chapters. The second part of the novel is narrated in a clearer, more conventional prose. Each chapter dealing with one character in the first part bears a strong thematic link with the chapter devoted to the same character in the second part. Thus Ángela, who is wearing a mask in the prologue of the novel and promises to herself that 'de un sólo golpe se quitará el antifaz' (p. 12), claims in part one: 'El mundo es un artefacto' (p. 83), and later in part two: 'Los Géminis [Diego's frightening dogs] también son artefactos' (p. 193), to finally wonder in the epilogue: '¿Por qué Emilia fabricará particularmente estos artefactos?' (p. 200). In the same way, Alfonso repeatedly identifies with the 'rey', either in the context of card games, chess or of the tale of the dwarf king.

If the overall architecture of the novel therefore follows the technique of the *son*, the chapters too are structured around the same device: in each of them, some initial phrases are repeated throughout, with or without variation, thereby revealing the protagonist's obsessions. Thus when Diego is looking for Emilia in the mountain, determined to bring her back, he keeps repeating to himself: 'El zapato lo aprieta, pero sigue [caminando]' (p. 103). Similarly, it is said of Alfonso: 'No sabe si las mujeres le gustan más que los gallos, pero están ahí, ahí. Ambos lo hacen sudar como un toro...' (p. 45). These two obsessions subsequently fuse into one, when Alfonso reflects: 'Soy un Gallo, un ave con plumas de Gallo, uno que sube y baja cualquier Gallina' (p. 46), later turning into: 'Yo soy un Gallo, soy un semental de pelea' (p. 49). Sandra, who is training to be a doctor, ponders over the genetic disorder in the family, that is, on her retarded cousin Alisio and her grandmother's madness: 'Después de Alisio fue la abuela' (p. 69).

García Calzada's prose displays a marked fondness for wordplays, alliterations and tongue twisters, particularly evident in the sketches, but not restricted to these. See, for instance: '¿Con qué derecho una zurda pide sus derechos y reveses?' (p. 11), or: 'Ay, Diego, diga, dos dogos se drogan en una callejuela. [...] Diego que pretendió darle al dado para que todos se conformaran, con forme, es decir, que tenían forma, un dado con forma, una forma de dado' (p. 203). Added to this is the narrator's playful attitude towards the reader, with whom a dialogue is frequently

established, especially in the chapters centring on Ángela: ‘Bien, pues, como les decía, ¿qué les decía? ah, que Ángela quería, con eso del espejo, ayudarles a buscar su identidad’ (p. 91). As in Cabrera Infante, language thus takes over the centre stage, relegating the action to the background. Diego comments on the power of words, on the mere pleasure of sounds, when he reflects on a childhood song (‘aserrín, aserrán/ los maderos de San Juan/ los de Juan piden pan/ los de Pedro piden queso/ y los de Enrique, alfeñique’): ‘eso lo cantaba su padre, *no entendía pero le gustaba*, ahora tampoco, pero ese juego de palabras *lo hechiza*, tantas erres, tantas vocales, que le llenan la boca de redondeces’ (p.19, emphasis added).

So not only does the word take precedence over the action, but the sound supersedes the meaning too. As in *Tres tristes tigres*, the characters of *Minimal son* are left with a feeling of superfluosity, the sensation that they have little control over their lives: this is conveyed through the metaphor of the spiderweb, which becomes a leitmotiv of the novel. This sense of superfluosity is reflected in the characters’ language: in accordance with the contentions of Pedreira and Glissant in connection with the Puerto Ricans and French Antilleans, all of García Calzada’s characters resort to the *merodeo expresivo* or *ruse du détour*, or *opacité*. So, as in Cabrera Infante too, they tend to use ‘un idioma secreto’. The one character who eventually seems to find a meaning to her life and feels (once she assumes her homosexuality) that she can at last remove the mask she has been wearing all her life, is also the character whose language is most straightforward, who is not taken up by the magic of words: Sandra. By contrast, the highly frustrated Ángela – repeatedly associated with the metaphor of the mask – uses a most hermetic language.

One way in which the characters circumvent linguistic transparency is through the use of codes. Thus Elsa would like to communicate with Sandra in a secret language: ‘Probaré hablarle en el nuevo sistema de señales’ (p. 23). Similarly, Alfonso remembers how Diego and he used to have a code that only they knew: ‘Piensa en Diego y [...] le dice suave al oído unas palabras que sólo ellos conocen, unas palabras que de niños se decían para que nadie pudiera, para que nadie entendiera, para que nadie penetrara en su complicidad’ (p. 122). Less childish, however, is the protagonists’ use of English, which is explicitly associated with socio-political dissent in the novel. As in Santos’s stories, English (as well as rock music) become symbols of globalization (that is, the imposition of the Anglo-

American economic and cultural models), but in contrast to Puerto Rico, García Calzada shows that these are systematically stigmatised in Revolutionary Cuba.<sup>58</sup> Thus Alfonso is convinced he was prevented from entering university ‘por ser el único blanquito y porque hablaba cuatro o cinco cosas en inglés... ah y el rock’ (p. 50). In fact, any contact with the US is viewed as subversive. Thus Sandra reports: ‘Anoche su madre habló por teléfono con Miami. [Sandra] quiso hablar, pero su madre lo impidió [...] Eso te perjudica, primero termina tu carrera’ (p. 62). Sandra further wonders about her mother’s use of English on the phone with her parents in the US: ‘¿por qué su madre hablará de esa jerigonza mitad español mitad inglés cuando habla con ellos?’ (p. 62). English thus emerges in the novel as a codified language, a signifier of ideological dissent.

The language to which the characters resort most, however, is a secret code that has all the appearance of standard Spanish but constantly alludes to a Cuban subtext – just as Schwarz-Bart and Glissant do with the Creole culture – thereby becoming governed by *le pouvoir de l’allogue*, to borrow Jermann’s expression in relation to Glissant’s French. The text is replete with cultural references that make a full understanding impossible without a solid knowledge of Latin American cultures and more specifically Cuba. As in Glissant, this *opacité* is based on the technique of stream of consciousness. It leads to a breakdown of meaning, thereby eroding the hegemonic discourse.

The children’s rhyme ‘aserrín aserrán’ mentioned above, for instance, is repeated and modified by Diego, turning into ‘Los de pan piden Juan, los de queso piden Pedro y los de alfeñique son de Enrique’ (p. 19). This modification could simply convey Diego’s anxiety (Emilia has just run away and he has set off to bring her back home). Yet the fact that such modifications occur throughout the novel suggests on the contrary a deliberate intention to undermine the conventional meaning, to show it breaking down under the pressure of the irrational. Similarly, the well-known Hispanic children’s rhyme ‘Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en su verde limón’, undergoes endless variations in one of the sketches, beginning with: ‘La pájara pinta posada, pintada en su verde limón, en su verde sillón, con el pico y la cola como un gorrión...’, following with ‘Estaba la pájara verde sentada en su

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<sup>58</sup> García Calzada is from Guantánamo Province, neighbouring Oriente Province, and her fiction includes several instances of characters (Paco in this novel) attempting to defect via the US navy base.

pinto limón...’, and ‘La pájara no está en la pinta, la pinta no tenía limón...’, to end: ‘La pájara, señores, qué pájara dirán el gorrión y la flor...’ (p. 32). This irruption of the irrational, however, is not confined to children’s rhymes, which are pretty nonsensical by essence, but also takes place in the characters’ speech (or, more appropriately, their thoughts). Thus Ángela reflects: ‘de todas formas estarán en desacuerdo, okey, que nadie será cuerdo, ni tendrá cuerda’ (p. 11), or Emilia: ‘Un paracáidas es eso, una caída que para, detiene la caída y a la vez cae, pero también, paracaídas es algo para que la caída se de’ (p. 150). In this a-logic code, therefore, one thing can be at once the same and its contrary: a parachute can be used both to prevent and facilitate the fall.

This opaque, irrational language truly emerges as a mother tongue, a tongue steeped in the local culture, of which it is at the same time the mirror. Unlike Cabrera Infante, García Calzada relies little on the use of idiolects. Yet her language is unmistakably Cuban, drawing on a cultural subtext made up of children’s rhymes and tales, as well as proverbs that provide the canvas onto which the plot is woven. The previous quotes have illustrated the importance of children’s rhymes in the text. There are other allusions to Little Red Hood and Cinderella, Tom Sawyer, Betty Boop, Jane (and Tarzan). Other elements are taken from the world of childhood. For instance, the *papalote* (kite) is a recurring motif of the novel, particularly connected to Alfonso, Diego, Sandra and Alisio. For Diego, the *papalote* becomes a metaphor for the sun (or the moon): ‘Alza los ojos y ve otra vez el papalote, ora en cruz, ora como un barquito que navega las nubes de un cielo plomizo’ (p. 97). For Alfonso, on the other hand, it becomes a metaphor for emotions: ‘lo único es esperar y oír a los Rolling Stones. Ah, qué bien se está, un papalote sube y se empina como una nave especial, el airecito, la nube que pasa...’ (p. 53). His fight with another character is likewise described in these terms: ‘Le romperá la nariz, aunque tenga que regresar al Combinado. [...] Una nube roja se detiene y explota en mil pedazos, en mil pedazos de papalote’ (p. 120). For the two brothers the *papalotes* are also metaphors for people.

The opening words of the novel indicate the significance of the world of childhood: ‘Yo soy la Ratoncita Pérez, dice, y se viste frente al espejo. Cada cual tiene su traje y ese es el de ella, no hay dudas, un traje perfecto de perfecta Ratoncita Pérez, porque no es una ratoncita cualquiera, se sabe con sólo mirarla, en ese aire de llegar, de escalar la maldita olla y comer’ (p. 9). The Ratoncito Pérez is the

protagonist of a children's tale that is particularly popular in Cuba: out of greediness, he eventually falls into a pan of soup. Thus, if many of the references to childhood mentioned above are common to several cultures, the very opening of the novel makes a specific allusion to the Cuban intimate world of childhood. This world is, obviously, particularly linked to women, as mothers, so that the language used in *Minimal son* is not only a mother tongue, but also a mothertongue. Significantly, in this new version the hero of the tale, the Ratoncito Pérez, is feminised and embodied by Ángela. Five out of the eight highly hermetic sketches mentioned above relate to female characters. The second one, which elaborates on the rhyme of the *pájara pinta* evokes a distinctively feminine world.

Yet girlhood is not the only world evoked in the novel: Diego and Alfonso are also connected to childhood, as evidenced with the motifs of the *papalote* and *rey enano*. The rhyme 'aserrín aserrán', for instance, is shown to be passed on from father to son (from Juan to Diego to Alisio). Interestingly, however, Diego perceives this rhyme as markedly foreign: it is Spanish. He remarks: 'Su padre sabía cantarla muy bien, con este acento español que él trata inútilmente de igualar' (p. 19). So there is a sense in the text that the *creole* culture of Cuba bears the strong imprint of the feminine, while the part of the peninsular legacy that has remained unaffected by cultural syncretism tends to be related more to the masculine.<sup>59</sup> This is reinforced by the fact that, as in Telchid, most proverbs are associated with female characters.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that a large part of the *creole* culture used as a subtext to the novel is evocative of the feminine and connected to the subconscious and the irrational, notably via the world of childhood, the irrational does not remain the prerogative of women. As already mentioned, besides the sketches there are hermetic passages inserted within the chapters, and many of them refer to male protagonists. The fact that the irrational and the illogical is predominantly yet not exclusively related to the feminine further indicates García Calzada's intention to distance herself from the convention worldwide that has long associated women with the obscure and incomprehensible, often labelling their non-conformism as sorcery.

García Calzada thus inscribes ideological dissent as well as cultural and gender difference through the use of what Glissant calls *opacité*, largely achieved through

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<sup>59</sup> Although the 'Pájara pinta' rhyme is also Spanish, it is widely popular in Latin America, which would explain why the characters do not perceive it as foreign, unlike the 'maderos de San Juan'.

the evocation of a creole culture strongly associated with women that draws on the hermetic world of childhood and the subconscious. Her linguistic practices lead to the non-definite, the non-fixed and the relative, thereby both eroding conventional Spanish and opening avenues to question the hegemonic, official discourse. Because of the way in which this official discourse has perpetuated and represented a specific notion of gender, often equating Revolution with masculinity, and femininity or sexual deviance with the antirevolutionary and antinationalist, an erosion of the official discourse implies a subversion of this representation of gender.<sup>60</sup> In this respect, García Calzada's prose meets the ends of the linguistic hybridity practised by her three counterparts from Puerto Rico and Guadeloupe. The inscription of difference in language carried out by Mayra Santos, Sylviane Telchid, Gisèle Pineau and Ana Luz García Calzada is therefore doubly empowering: besides endowing post-colonial subjects with a voice of their own, it enables post-colonial women in particular to speak up. Women are acknowledged in the four texts analysed above as full participants in the elaboration of Caribbean cultures. The next chapter examines the crucial role women writers themselves play in shaping regional identity discourses.

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<sup>60</sup> On the problematic equation of masculinity and the revolutionary offered by the official rhetoric and epitomised by Fidel, see Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, 'Twenty Questions on Sex and Gender in Revolutionary Cuba', p. 150 and p. 156, *Cuban Studies* 18 (1988), pp. 149-158.

## **Addressing and Redressing the Canon: Women Writers and Identity Discourses**

### **Contemporary women writers: appropriating the literary canon**

The previous chapters have shown how women writers in the 1990s (and some of their predecessors) have been subverting the literary canons of the Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean. Together with a revision of the conventional portrayals of women in local literature – as archetypal mother, lover, or symbol for the nation – their fiction has undertaken a critique of the predominant representations (or absence thereof) of the role of women in nation-building, questioning their depiction as passive, alienated, or treacherous. It has also challenged the dissemination of overtly sexist views regarding the emergence of creole cultures, and countered the frequent obliteration of women's involvement in this process, an obliteration that includes the constant marginalisation of women writers from the literary canon. This chapter explores the ways in which women's fiction directly engages with the major regional identity discourses, adapting, adjusting and in some cases rejecting them, thereby founding a feminine, or 'womanist', literary tradition that runs as a counter-discourse to the theories and canon enunciated by their male counterparts, which Belinda Edmondson terms 'oppositionality'.

Edmondson argues that the notion of 'oppositionality' has been fundamental in the shaping of the Anglophone canon: 'The "traditional" Anglophone West Indian

novel [...] is almost by definition oppositional, in that it engages the question of how to constitute a regional/cultural identity against the hegemonic imperative of English colonial culture' ('The Canon, The West Indian Writer, and the Novel', p. 2). She notes how Anglophone writers have maintained a dialogue with the British classics, notably *The Tempest*, *Jane Eyre* and *Heart of Darkness*. Yet she also points out that the conception of identity that emerges from early postcolonial Caribbean writing reveals its 'not-always-oppositional engagement with the English discourse', since Caribbeanness has conventionally been defined in the same terms as Englishness (p. 60). Similar observations to Edmondson's apply across the archipelago. If 'oppositionality' is a common feature of Caribbean literature, it is particularly characteristic of women's writing in the area, here perhaps more so than in the West, because the fight is two-fold: while women join the men in challenging a Eurocentric discourse, they also unite with many women writers worldwide (and particularly their Afro-American counterparts) to challenge phallocentrism. This tradition accounts for the continuous dialogue women writers have engaged with the twentieth-century discourses that have shaped the male-dominated literary canon of the region.

Condé likewise maintains that the work by early Francophone women writers undermines the literary norms of their male contemporaries (*Entretiens avec Maryse Condé*, p. 33),<sup>1</sup> while Arnold contends that contemporary Francophone women's writing disregards 'the teleological project' of the masculinist *créolistes* that requires 'a certain locale [...], a certain use of Creole [...], a certain gendering of characters, narrators, and even [a certain] geography'.<sup>2</sup> Condé's own rejection of the pan-Africanist identity paradigm, discussed shortly, does not provide any alternative, for instance in the representation of a successful female identity quest.

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<sup>1</sup> Haigh concurs with this view when she shows that Lacrosil and Manicom challenge Fanon's analysis of the cultural assimilation and alienation of the Caribbean woman, while later writers such as Condé, Schwarz-Bart and Warner-Vieyra reject Césaire's model of the identity quest, because 'the roles of the negritude quest are so fixed and [...] so "gendered" that the discourse of negritude is unable to function when those roles are reversed' (*Mapping a Tradition*, pp. 67-68).

<sup>2</sup> 'The Gendering of *créolité*', pp. 39-40. The works of Condé and Schwarz-Bart, Arnold argues, offer a much greater freedom. This point is clearly illustrated in Condé by the *errance* of her characters (who move between West Africa, the United States, and throughout the Caribbean), her language, which was for long criticised as too (standard) French, and the shift between male and female protagonists or narrators in her books. In Schwarz-Bart, while the settings and language seem to meet the requirements of the male *créoliste* canon (which she actually preceded), the element of dream is actually a form of *errance*. There is also a greater pan-Caribbeanist vision in her choice of characters.



This could indicate her intention to question the over-representation of the identity quest in Caribbean literature, as well as to point to the inadequacy of the terms in which identity is posited in the major Caribbean discourses: today the understanding of Caribbean identity as a fixed and rigid identity is no longer pertinent. This last intention is evidenced in her involvement as co-editor of *Penser la créolité*, which in fact invites the reader to re-think the terms of *créolité*. Michael Dash notes how in *Traversée de la mangrove* Condé likewise critiques the *créolité* movement 'which she clearly sees as attempting to create a false ideological construct from a process that is open, unpredictable, and always in a state of becoming' (*The Other America*, p. 120).

What this chapter will show is how some 1990s women's fiction from both the Francophone and Hispanic areas (together with several prededing texts from the 1970s and 1980s) enters into dialogue with pan-Africanism (Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *L'Autre qui danse* and Adelaida Fernández de Juan's *Dolly y otros cuentos africanos*), the discourses on the alienation of the colonised (Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Mayra Santos's 'Hebra rota'), and pan-Caribbeanism (Marta Rojas's *El columpio de Rey Spencer* and Sylviane Telchid's *Throvia de la Dominique*).

### **Women's response to pan-Africanism**

As examined in the introduction, the impact of pan-Africanist movements on the cultural and ideological production of the Caribbean was unprecedented, shedding a new light on the conception of cultural identity throughout the region. When the limitations of the tenets of pan-Africanism began to be recognised, women played an important role in the assessment process. Their specific reservations, as women, towards the gendered formulation of a newly reconfigured identity made them particularly apt critics of another tenet of pan-Africanism, its Afrocentrism. Because in the Hispanic Antilles pan-African movements were not so resolutely Afrocentric, but relied instead on the notion of *mestizaje*, more counter-discourses emerged in the Francophone area, with Fanon, Glissant and Depestre, among others. Consequently, it is here as well that most women writers have sought to expose the inadequacy of the *négritude* identity paradigm, particularly for the female subject. Operating a deliberate reversal in the gendered terms of the *négritude* identity quest, Maryse

Condé's first two novels *Heremakhonon* and *Une saison à Rihata* both portray a Guadeloupean protagonist going to find her cultural roots in 'Father Africa' via an idealised African lover.<sup>3</sup> The ultimate failure of both quests suggests the impossibility of their enterprise. Simone Schwarz-Bart likewise denounces the *négritude* quest as a fallacy in *Ti Jean l'Horizon*.<sup>4</sup> In her earlier novel *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Schwarz-Bart has her protagonist assert that her identity is rooted not in Africa, but in the Guadeloupean soil, hence her final wish, 'je mourrai là, debout dans mon jardin' which both opens and closes the novel.

*Juletane* by the Guadeloupean Myriam Warner-Vieyra also operates a reversal of the *négritude* paradigm.<sup>5</sup> Here the protagonist fails in her identity quest for exactly the same reason as her counterparts in Condé's novels: because she has idealised Africa and/through her African husband Mamadou. Juletane goes to Africa in search of her cultural roots only to discover that she fits neither in a Muslim West African society, nor – more importantly – in a polygamous family. Moreover, she realises that despite her racial pride, her Caribbean origins set her apart, and Mamadou's third wife actually calls her either a madwoman or a 'toubabesse', or white woman. Here Warner-Vieyra challenges the conception of blackness as universal, and the idea that the blacks make a homogeneous people. Instead of providing the cultural authenticity she strives for, this journey to Africa results in a complete loss of identity for Juletane, who is gradually 'stripped of all those qualities that she had once considered most basic to her personal identity. Not only did she lose her capacity to bear children and her identity as a mother during her first months in Africa, she also lost her identity as primary wife when Mamadou announced that he had already married a woman five years before'.<sup>6</sup> Added to this is Juletane's loss of racial identity, 'her rival co-wife, Ndèye, categorized her in the odd position of the white woman, the outsider, the colonizer' (p. 599). Thus by

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<sup>3</sup> *Hérémakhonon*, Paris: Union générale des éditeurs, 1976; *Une saison à Rihata*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> *Ti Jean L'horizon*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1979. See Haigh's *Mapping a Tradition* on Condé and Schwarz-Bart. In the latter the protagonist eventually fails in his search for identity because of his misguided belief that he will encounter his father (and therefore his identity) in Africa. Despite the male protagonist, the novel exposes the inadequate gendering of the *négritude* paradigm, questioning the validity of the representation of Africa as *motherland*, as well as the role ascribed to women and mother figures in the quest process, which is, to say the least, passive, since they have to die in order for the hero to embark on his quest.

<sup>5</sup> Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *Juletane*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Juliette M. Rogers, 'Reading, Writing and Recovering: Creating a Women's Creole Identity in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*', p. 599, *The French Review* 69. 4 (March 1996), pp.595-604.

setting her novel in an Islamic society, Warner-Vieyra is able to stress the potential dangers of a return to cultural roots and to traditions that, for women in particular, can prove extremely harmful.<sup>7</sup>

In this day and age of pan-Caribbeanist and creolisation discourses, several women writers find a need to re-examine the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean. They call for a re-evaluation of the role of Africa in the shaping of the regional ideology, arguing that it is time to revise the way the continent figures in the literary imagination. Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *L'autre qui danse*, for instance, is an open critique of the pan-Africanist identity quest.<sup>8</sup> Like her Guadeloupean predecessors, the Martiniquan author engages with the *négritude* paradigm, at once Afrocentric and androcentric.

The itinerary of her protagonist Rehvana mirrors that of the Antilleans over the past five centuries, with the initial deportation from Africa to the Caribbean, and then the economic or political exodus to the metropolis (Paris, London, New York, Miami, Toronto, or Montreal) from the 1940s onwards. Although the first part of the novel is ostensibly based in Paris, it actually stands for the initial, African phase of the Antillean diaspora: Rehvana has joined the Ebonis, a sect of young Antillean exiles striving to be African. Later she embarks for Martinique, to return to Paris in the final part. As if the mirror were convex, however, Rehvana's journey is not a faithful reflection of that of the Antillean diaspora, but its distorted image, for the Africa Rehvana leaves behind was a sham – the Ebonis' hallucinatory recreation of a mythical Africa that bears no relation to reality –, the Martinique of her homecoming is a product of her imagination – as further discussed in the next chapter, the text stresses the gap between Rehvana's construct and the actual Martinique –, and, instead of providing subsistence, the Paris to which she eventually retreats only brings her poverty: she ultimately dies of starvation. So while Rehvana's journey apparently retraces that of the Antillean diaspora, the cycle is in fact perverted.

The text thus indicates the impossibility of the return to origins so pivotal to pan-Africanist ideology. From its opening, the novel establishes a constant dialogue with

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<sup>7</sup> The Antiguan Jamaica Kincaid echoes Warner-Vieyra and Condé, when in an interview with Gerhard Dilger she states her distrust for traditions: 'women especially have to be very careful of these traditions. [...] because there is no tradition of freedom, they have to make it up' (p. 21).

<sup>8</sup> Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie, *L'Autre qui danse*, Paris: Seghers, 1989.

the canonical authors of the *négritude* movement, Césaire and Senghor, as well as with their successor, Fanon. Senghor's influence is felt in the structure of the novel: each part is entitled a *chant*. There is also a direct allusion to the Senegalese poet, when the leader of the sect Abdoulaye (Rehvana's boyfriend) criticises him for being a defector, a black man suffering from a lactification complex: 'l'imposteur, [le] soi-disant apôtre de la négritude triomphante, celui-là même qui accepta de se dénégrier, de se verdier – à défaut, peut-être, de pouvoir se blanchir tout à fait – pour entrer à l'Académie des Blancs, au cœur de ce bastion raciste...' (p. 53). Despite such fierce criticism, the Ébonis readily embrace the tenets of pan-Africanism. Although Rehvana is only half convinced by Abdoulaye's argument, she voices a similar accusation in relation to Jérémie: 'tout ce qui t'intéresse, c'est de mener ta petite vie mesquine d'assimilé, avalé, digéré; tu ne vois donc pas que tu n'es qu'un nègre blanchi, récupéré, minable!' (p. 27). Such comments, of course, strongly echo Fanon, whose first essay remains an important subtext throughout the novel. Thus when the Ébonis plan to bomb Beaubourg, 'cette forteresse du patrimoine intellectuel occidental, qui apprivoise et asservit la culture nègre en la vidant de sa substance' (p. 52), hoping to 'bala[yer] d'un coup cette mascarade, et secou[er] pêle-mêle peaux blanches et bergamasques noires' (p. 55), they sarcastically invoke Fanon for their act of terrorism. The other main subtext to the novel is of course Césaire's *Cahier*. It is to this paragon of Antillean *négritude* that the first chapter refers most. The description of Fort-de-France on the first page is thus resonant with the beginning of the poem, where 'cette ville plate' is depicted 'au bout du petit matin' in all its sordidness:

pieds larges comme des gommiers, dévorés d'éléphantiasis [...] Et sa mère qui disait, au lendemain du cyclone, de ne pas aller nu-pieds dans les rues de la ville, cette autre ville, au sortir du cyclone, grouillante de ravets et de rats, ceux qui sont morts dans la tourmente et flottent, pattes raidies, museau pointu et roide, exhibant leurs ventres gonflés sur les eaux de la mer répandues dans la ville – la ville hébétée au matin et souillée de toutes les immondices charriées par les vents déchaînés de la nuit... (*L'Autre qui danse*, pp. 17-18).<sup>9</sup>

A couple of pages further on, the novel re-writes the scene of the tramway. When Abdoulaye publicly batters Rehvana on the underground train, a stranger,

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<sup>9</sup> This extract can be read against the following passage in the *Cahier*: 'Et le lit de planches [...], avec ses pattes de caisses de Kérosine, comme s'il avait l'éléphantiasis le lit [...] (au dessus du lit, dans un pot plein d'huile un lumignon dont la flamme danse comme un gros ravet...)', pp. 18-19, and 'C'est là surtout que la mer déverse ses immondices, ses chats morts et ses chiens crevés. Car la rue débouche sur la plage, et la plage ne suffit pas à la rage écumante de la mer', p. 19.

Jérémie, intervenes to protect her. His act of bravery causes him to be stabbed in the throat with an Afro comb – and of course the fact that this symbol of racial pride should be turned into a destructive weapon by the Ébonis further points to the extent of the perversion of their identity quest. The shame Rehvana experiences during this episode deliberately recalls that of the poetic voice in the *Cahier*:

Mon Dieu! Comme elle voudrait être ailleurs! Elle voudrait leur crier qu'elle n'est pas à sa place. [...] Elle a honte, simultanément, d'avoir honte d'être là, sous les regards des voyageurs paisibles, méduses terrorisées serrant leurs sacs sur leurs genoux, et elle est rouge de confusion, rouge de coups, tuméfiée de coups et de honte (*L'Autre qui danse*, p. 20).<sup>10</sup>

Drawing so explicitly on the key texts of *négritude* allows Dracius-Pinalie to emphasise the incongruity of Antilleans turning to Africa in order to construct their identity. It is no coincidence that the least purist – as well as the least alienated – member of the sect should be the only real African, Aganila. It is she who helps Rehvana to escape from the initiation ceremony at the beginning of the novel. In her delirium at the opening of the novel, Rehvana envisages her as proud and resistant, as Mother African incarnate, to whom she pays tribute by naming her daughter after her. In actuality, though, Aganila also tries to reconcile the two black communities, bridging the rivalry between real and fake Africans:

Il y avait progressivement eu brouille avec les Africains de pure souche, non métissés et détenteurs de passeports authentiques de l'Afrique compromise [qui provoquaient] de sanglantes bagarres contre cette bande de mal blanchis, arrière-petits-fils d'esclaves [...]. Rejetés par ceux-là mêmes qu'ils croyaient être leurs alliés, leurs frères, les Ébonis avaient été contraints de vouer une haine farouche à ces indignes ostentateurs du passeport et du titre d'Africain (pp. 57-58).

In this explicit passage, Dracius-Pinalie argues together with Fanon in 'Antillais et Africains' (discussed in the introduction) that the cultural differences between Antilleans and Africans cannot be overlooked; ignoring them only causes further alienation, as in the case of the Ébonis.

If a return to mythical origins proves to be impossible for Rehvana, so is a return to an idealised native land. Here Rehvana's quest fails because, unlike the poetic voice in *Cahier*, she is unable to see Martinique for what it is. Instead, she

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<sup>10</sup> The Cesairian text reads:

'Un nègre comique et laid et des femmes derrière moi ricanaient en le regardant.  
Il était COMIQUE ET LAID,  
COMIQUE ET LAID, pour sûr.  
J'arborai un grand sourire complice...  
Ma lâcheté retrouvée!' (p. 41).

constructs a fantasy inspired by what the island was a couple of generations back, a traditional Martinique that no longer exists. So Rehvana's is more a journey through time than through space: she does not so much move from a Parisian recreation of Africa to Martinique as from the late 1980s to the 1940s. Here again, then, it is an impossible journey. Rehvana submits herself to such mortification because she is convinced that in order to be an 'authentic' Martiniquan woman, she has to live like her grandmothers.

Both the returns on which Rehvana embarks are therefore denounced as fallacies by the author, and the pan-Africanist figurative or literal 'return to the native/mother land' is debunked. Africa and the native land as envisaged by the Antillean *négritude* poet cannot be reached. In fact, more than being generous mothers, they turn out to be unkind stepmothers. To Rehvana, these *motherlands* are fateful: her tragic end is clearly the result of her fierce, misguided quest for a mythical Africa and an idealised Martinique divorced from reality. Instead of finding the cultural identity she strives for, first in the so-called African sect and then in Martinique, Rehvana only encounters physical and psychological pain: hunger, cold, discomfort, and abuse. By the time she flies back to Paris, she is so deeply alienated that she can no longer survive. She dies delirious. By portraying her protagonist as delirious in both the opening and closing scenes of the novel, the author thus wishes to signify that Rehvana's life amounts to continuous hallucination. The artificial nature of the protagonist's position is emphasised by the fact that she is actually of middle-class origin: rather than living in a squat with the sect, she could share a flat with her sister Matildana and receive financial support from her parents.

It is her deep alienation that misleads Rehvana in her identity quest. The text reveals how she suffered from a lactification complex as a teenager: 'Elle se trouve déjà un tout petit peu trop noire, toujours un petit peu trop noire. Un vrai désespoir, ses cheveux: il faut impérativement les avoir raides [...] c'est ça la mode!' (p. 341).<sup>11</sup> The unconditional desire for African authenticity she develops later, then, is, in accordance with Fanon's analysis of the phenomenon in 'Antillais et Africains', an over-reaction: 'le grand mirage noir' following 'la grande erreur blanche'. Thus Rehvana's attitude to her hair a few years later is radically different: 'Oh! Elle a tout essayé, a suivi toutes les trajectoires excessives du ressourcement

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<sup>11</sup> The phenomenon of lactification is discussed at length in the next section, in relation to Danticat and Santos.

systematique, y compris les interminables séances de tressage des cheveux, à se faire impitoyablement tirer, un à un, huit à huit, des cheveux trop lisses pour rester bien longtemps tressés' (p. 25). Yet both attitudes reveal that Rehvana is unable to come to terms with her *métissage* (obvious in her physical appearance, since she is a *mûlatresse*) in order to construct herself a positive identity. Instead, she strives for an authenticity that must be atavistic, exclusive, *either* European, *or* African. In the sect, she endures anachronistic customs imposed by such a claim to 'authenticity'.

Equally alienated are Rehvana's successive boyfriends Abdoulaye and Éric. Abdoulaye is presented, with the rest of the sect, as alienated (they are all depicted as lunatics) because he fails to find a positive sense of identity as an Antillean: his adoption of an African identity is as fake as it is self-destructive. On the other hand, Éric is representative of some Antilleans rendered totally irresponsible by their reliance on the financial assistance that the political and economic dependence of their islands ensures. Both men are characterised by a violence that stems directly from their alienation. As Fanon demonstrates in *Les Damnés de la terre* – analysed in more detail in the next section – their behaviour follows a pattern commonly found among the colonised: they seek an escape to their powerlessness by perpetrating violence against those more powerless than themselves, usually women.

They are indeed responsible for most of the suffering Rehvana endures, which is directly linked to her condition as woman. In the opening scene of the novel, the protagonist is running away from the sect, refusing to be scarred during the fake initiation ceremony imposed exclusively on the female members. Later on, when the sect is facing adversity, it is a girl, Fassou, who is used as a scapegoat and consequently has to expiate for the rest of the Ebonis by submitting to public whipping. Finally, Rehvana is struck by Abdoulaye on the underground train, out of pure jealousy. Her self-victimising attitude is clear, however, in that she refuses to file a complaint against the abuse, deciding to go back to her boyfriend instead. When she finally leaves him, it is for Éric, who turns out to be a worse abuser and only uses her for his financial, sexual and domestic needs. In Martinique too, Rehvana is victimised because of her sex: her suffering stems from her desire to become a traditional Martiniquan woman at all costs, which drives her to conform to obsolete values especially prejudicial to the female sex. Even then, it is not until Éric's new mistress settles under their roof that Rehvana leaves him. Here, like Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Dracius-Pinalie's novel stresses the perniciousness of the

search for authenticity implied by the return to Africa of *négritude*, for it can turn out particularly oppressive to women.

In contrast with the falsely authentic traditions Rehvana thinks she is embracing, the novel presents genuine cultural values embodied by her sister Matildana. Although the text focuses on Rehvana, Matildana is the real heroine of the novel, the 'other' mentioned in the title. The title refers to a scene where everybody is dancing in a circle, recalling the slave tradition on the plantations:

Je vous parle d'une danse haute lame, où le nègre se rachète sans coutelas. Je vous parle d'une suée voulue, *qui lave et a toujours lavé les sanies de l'aliénation*. Je vous parle de la fête nocturne.

C'est la même qui *secouait les chaînes* aux soirs des plantations, on ne l'apprend pas dans les académies, et Matildana la connaît [...]

Elle [la danse] est bouillonnement et *fusion*, elle est *vigueur*, vous dis-je! *mouvements d'âmes et communion*.

Elle ne se danse pas seul (pp. 72-74, emphasis added).

The traditional slave dance is thus liberating, and the culture inherited from slave ancestors is seen as the best weapon against alienation. Significantly, Matildana knows the dance, whereas Rehvana does not join in. While Rehvana is bound to fail in her attempt to embrace an alien African culture, Matildana is sustained by her Creole cultural heritage. This culture, firmly rooted in the Caribbean, contrasts with the African customs to which Rehvana turns. Dracius-Pinalie thus opposes the *antillanité* advocated by Glissant to the pan-Africanist identity offered by the *négritude* movement. This point will be expanded in the next chapter.

Although, as will be argued in the next chapter, the political implications of the identity Matildana constructs for herself is problematic, Dracius-Pinalie's text remains instrumental in challenging the pan-Africanist contention that Antilleans can find an authentic identity in Africa.

In Adelaida Fernández de Juan's *Dolly y otros cuentos africanos*, Africa is also demystified.<sup>12</sup> Of course in the Cuban context the glorification of Africa was motivated by politics – with the need to find an official justification for the intervention in Angola (1975-1991) – more than it was related to pan-Africanist intellectualism. So what is really at stake here, what Fernández de Juan is debunking, is Cuban involvement in African politics. Yet because the Cuban

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<sup>12</sup> Adelaida Fernández de Juan, *Dolly y otros cuentos africanos*, Havana: Letras Cubanas (Pinos Nuevos), 1994.



government's involvement in Africa deliberately relied on an *afrocubanista* discourse to rally popular support, *afrocubanista* writing remains an important reference for Fernández de Juan's collection of short stories. From 1975, Fidel Castro made numerous public declarations regarding the 'Afro-Latin American' nature of the Cuban people, intending to serve two purposes: first, to justify the resources (mostly human) spent in Angola. Since a large proportion of the servicemen sent to Africa were black, these statements were of great significance.<sup>13</sup> Castro's claims also aimed to achieve greater cohesion at home: a public assertion of Cuba's African heritage would only reinforce the official contention that the Revolution had fully integrated the black population into the rest of society. Given the continuing marginalisation endured by many blacks across the Hispanic Caribbean, such declarations were bound to have a significant resonance among Afro-Cubans.

The title of Fernández de Juan's collection, strongly evocative of Lydia Cabrera's *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1940), seems to be establishing a dialogue with the *afrocubanista* tradition. Fernández de Juan's stories, however, actually have little in common with the traditional Afro-Antillean tales that survive until today in the Caribbean. They are not tales *from* Africa, but tales *about* Africa. Rather than reflecting an ancestral African culture and mythology, these stories confront the realities of modern Africa, and more specifically, Zambia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yet the very choice of such an ambiguous title could point to the author's intention to explore the relationship the Caribbean, and in particular Cuba, entertains with Africa through an examination of the continent as it stands in present times. So just as Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's novel engages with *négritude*, this collection could be said to engage, at least on some level, with *afrocubanismo*.

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<sup>13</sup> Due to the contention that colour differences have been eradicated from post-1959 Cuba and the absence of statistics that record the influence of the racial factor, no official figures are available. Yet according to Edward George, several veterans made unsubstantiated claims in interviews that 'black Cubans were sent in disproportionately large numbers to fight in Angola while "white" Cubans avoided the worst of the fighting'. He adds: 'in the 1960s and early 1970s nearly all the Cubans sent on internationalist missions to Africa were black, a policy ostensibly adopted in the belief that black Cubans would blend more easily with the local population and would attract less attention when travelling to and from Africa. Ironically, many black Cubans in the FAR may have looked on Angola as a genuine opportunity to gain the sort of rapid promotion otherwise denied to them in Cuba itself'. See 'The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991, from Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale: A Detailed Study of Cuban Internationalism and the Angolan War', Ph.D diss. (2 vols.), University of Bristol, October 2001, pp. 326-327.

Several stories reveal indeed how Africa stands in the Cuban collective imagination, as they show the expectations the Cuban brigade had of the continent prior to its arrival. Thus 'El *Chief* Chikola' begins with the following statement:

Cuando niña, me imaginaba a las tribus como en las ilustraciones de los libros, un grupo de gente sentada alrededor del Jefe, que se distingue por una corona o un atuendo diferente, y al fondo unas casas, de donde sale el inevitable humo como símbolo de vida. En las películas, el Jefe de una tribu siempre es un anciano autoritario a quien se visita por la noche en su tienda y al que, mientras habla, todos asienten (*Dolly y otros cuentos africanos*, p. 37).

The story then ostensibly proceeds to undermine those stereotypes, but only to subsequently replace them with new ones. Another comment indicates some degree of identification of Cuba with the black continent, of recognition of its blackness. In 'Dolly', the narrator explains: 'te llamaré Dolly, porque eres cómo una muñequita, y pensé: una muñeca negra, de esas que las niñas como yo siempre quisimos tener, por tradición o por novedad o vaya a saber por qué' (p. 8). The 'tradición' mentioned here seems to refer to the gollywog tradition, associated with slavery, while 'novedad' could refer to US black nationalist movements in the 1960s.

Yet the text questions the validity of the *afrocubanista* discourse by stressing throughout the cultural differences between Africans and Cubans. It thereby undermines the rhetoric that underlies the island's intervention in African politics, based on a recuperation of *afrocubanismo* for political ends. Here as in Fanon's 'Antillais et Africains', the cultural link established by *afrocubanistas* is – while not questioned – put into perspective. Africa is demystified in the text on various other levels. Firstly, with the confrontation between the realities of modern-day East Africa and the mythical image of Africa the Cubans have preconceived at home. Secondly, African traditions are shown to be pernicious, as discussed shortly in connection to 'Dolly'.

The Africa encountered by the narrator of *Dolly y otros cuentos africanos* – a doctor on a cooperation mission in Zambia, just like the author had been between 1988 and 1990 – shares little with the grandiose Africa of the pan-Africanists: it is riddled with poverty and illness. This, of course, might be imputable to the fact that a health mission is by definition located in an underdeveloped area. The narrator's attitude towards her surroundings and the insiders, however, could also be largely responsible for the negative image of Africa that emerges from the stories. Unlike Rehvana, the narrator rejects any possibility of identification with Africa. Instead,

she distances herself from her surroundings by insisting on the numerous cultural differences. The fact that the continent is shown in all its sordidness only helps this dissociation process, and the text betrays a certain arrogance of the onlookers in relation to the inhabitants. Indeed, it seems to suggest that virtually everybody in the country is a cripple, physically or mentally: all six phone operators are blind, the son of the most influential man in town dies of AIDS, mental disorders affect a great part of the population. Even Dolly, whom the narrator befriended, ends up committing suicide. This is particularly true in the story 'Henry', where the description of the three indigenous characters focuses on the squint, stammer and unpleasant smell suggesting poor hygiene coupled with alcoholism of the first, the mental retardation of the second, and the limp of the third.

The dichotomy between 'us' – the seventeen members of the Cuban international brigade – and 'them' – the Zambians, sometimes lumped together with other foreign cooperation workers – present in most stories thus conveys the Cuban doctors' horror at the appalling living conditions of the locals. Yet it also denotes a certain dissociation of the Cubans from their surroundings, their reluctance to integrate. They live in a closed community, show little interest in Zambian people and culture, spending instead most of their time trying to recreate Cuba abroad. Thus, rather than eating bread made of '*nshima*, como ustedes llaman a la harina blanca que a nosotros cubanos nunca llegó a gustarnos' (p. 7), they insist on cooking *tamales* every week-end. In 'El tío', this dichotomy is taken to such an extreme, that when they meet a stranger who is obviously not Zambian, they assume he is Cuban: 'Era tan alto, tan mulato, y se reía tan escandalosamente que no dejaba lugar a dudas, tenía que ser cubano' (p.25). He turns out to be Maurician, but, united by 'la común añoranza por el mar que teníamos en aquella parte cerrada del África' (p. 26), they adopt him as an eighteenth member of the brigade. This detail is significant, since it points to the fact that the Cubans feel more affinities with the Creole culture of Mauritius than with African culture. Only through Julia, a local who studied in Cuba for five years, do they attempt to learn more about Zambia. The attitude of the Cuban brigade is thus diametrically opposite to that of Rehvana, who in her exile submits herself to foreign African customs. The internationalists' position is also far away from the fraternal Antillean-African embrace envisaged by pan-Africanists: the depiction of Antilleans working in Africa provided in

Fernández de Juan's text, though, constitutes a more faithful account of history than the 'return of the prodigal son' these – and Rehvana with the sect – imagined.

The passage p. 8 quoted above also betrays a certain arrogance on the part of the Cubans. Inadvertently, the narrator's perception of her African friend as a doll and subsequent objectification of her through the nickname 'Dolly' reproduces an imperialist discourse. The fact that the narrator does so in order to save herself the trouble of memorising Dolly's real name, which she finds ugly, further reveals the extent of her prejudices and her lack of openness to Zambian cultural values: 'me dijiste "Lufungulu", y yo, qué va, ni una sola palabra extraña más, te llamaré Dolly [...]. Lo cierto es que todos te empezaron a llamar así, y hasta [tu jefa, y la jefa de las jefas]; a ellas no le pusimos ningún nombre bonito, porque tú las odiabas'. Only with time does the narrator become more self-critical: 'Ahora que te escribo, si supieras, me doy cuenta de que nunca te preguntamos si te parecía bonito Dolly... Perdón, Lufungulu, al menos me queda el consuelo de saber que te acostumbraste' (p. 8).

In 'Dolly', though, the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' does more than simply conveying the Cuban doctors' horror at the appalling living conditions of the locals and their haughtiness towards the latter. It further stresses the gap between the two communities. In the story, the narrator, back in Cuba, is writing to her friend Dolly, a young local nurse who worked with her. As is progressively revealed, however, Dolly is dead: she committed suicide two days before her wedding, and shortly after the Cubans' departure, because she was betrothed to a man she hated. So here again, rather than being held in respect as is often the case in pan-Africanist discourses, as in Dracius-Pinalie and her Guadeloupean predecessors, there is a denunciation of African traditions on the grounds that these are often particularly harmful to women. But what is perhaps more significant in Fernández de Juan is the narrator's lack of awareness regarding Dolly's distress. In the story, the young nurse is repeatedly described as happy, and many references are made to her bright smile and joyful laughter. Since the two women were extremely close, the text seems to suggest that there was in fact no real communication between them. Here again, it points to the (cultural) gap between internationalists and insiders, between Antilleans and Africans.

In addition to the perhaps unwitting depiction of the negative attitude of many Cuban internationalists, Fernández de Juan's collection of short stories further

subverts the official discourse by exposing the conditions in which this cooperation was carried out, both for the Zambians and the Cubans. Firstly, it highlights (notably in 'Carta a Teresa') the scarcity of medical resources and inadequacy of the health care system, thus perhaps implying that in reality international aid programmes were a negligible part of the Cuban action in Africa, which focused on warfare: 'He tenido que poner a doce enfermos en el suelo, ya no caben ni a dos por cama. [Puedo además decirte que] sólo hay un bombillo por sala, que no hay agua en el hospital desde el mediodía, y que una rata inmensa merodea por los pasillos' (p. 44). Secondly, 'Los egipcios' reveals the strict surveillance under which Cuban internationalists were kept in order to prevent any contact with other foreign cooperation workers. The comic element of the story stems from the gap between the triviality of a given situation and the inadequacy of the response it triggers among the Cuban brigade members:

Ellos [the Egyptians] fueron las primeras víctimas de nuestros temores. Nos entrenamos en hacerles preguntas agudas, en saber interpretar bien las respuestas para descubrir el espionaje que seguramente hacían, porque tratarían de penetrarnos, de desviarnos, y había que estar alertas.

Cuando Habib me preguntó por primera vez cómo era la vida en nuestro país, dio inicio a la serie de reuniones que el Jefe de nuestra brigada consideró muy necesarias, y que desde entonces haríamos noche tras noche (p. 16).

Despite the humorous tone of this exposure of collective paranoia, here the story boldly implies that Cold War politics remained at the heart of Cuban cooperation projects, taking on proportions that went beyond rationality.

The arrogance of the cooperation teams, the inadequacy of Cuban aid, and the overwhelming significance of the politics behind the aid programmes are all elements in the text that question the humanitarian nature of Cuban cooperation, in order to suggest that, after all, politics came first in the matter, and that humanitarianism was but a means to other ends. Despite the very different political context of the Cuban author's open (although measured) critique, Fernández de Juan's *Dolly y otros cuentos africanos* nonetheless reiterates the reservations of Condé, Schwarz-Bart, Warner-Vieyra, and Dracius-Pinalie regarding the pan-Africanist advocacy of a 'return' to Africa. Here as in the other texts, it is not the recognition of the African heritage of the Caribbean that is at stake, but the relevance of the pan-Africanist response to the Caribbean reality. As in the Martiniquan text, Caribbeanness and Creolisation are seen as more appropriate

alternatives to pan-Africanism: the bond between the Cubans and the Maurician echoes indeed the type of solidarities among all Creole people called for by the *créolistes*, discussed in the introduction. As examined in the next sections, Francophone and Hispanic writers in the 1990s find the identity discourses of Fanon and Marqués on the alienation of the colonised, as well as pan-Caribbeanism more constructive.

### **The alienation of the colonised in women's writing**

As mentioned in the introduction, *Peau noire, masques blancs* had a paralysing impact on early French Caribbean women writers such as Mayotte Capécia. Nevertheless, Fanon's work has had a decisive, more constructive influence on recent female authors from both the Francophone area and Puerto Rico. The relevance of Fanon's thought to their own (neo)-colonial predicament, especially in its analysis of the colonised subject's socio-cultural assimilation and ensuing alienation, explains its resonance among Puerto Rican intellectuals.

Fanon argues that one of the effects of colonisation is the misguided violence of the colonised. The mechanism he describes in *Peau noire, masques blancs* is a kind of self-inflicted, mental torture amounting to a form of suicide, in psychological and sometimes physical terms. This misguided, psychological violence often takes the form of lactification, that is the colonised's desire to whiten, either through miscegenation or through the adoption of a metropolitan lifestyle and the coloniser's values. The violence Fanon analyses in his later *Les Damnés de la terre* is physical and directed at the fellow colonised instead of the oppressor. The Martiniquan psychiatrist notes that aggressiveness is characteristic of the colonised (here the Algerians): 'La première chose que l'indigène apprend, c'est à rester à sa place, à ne pas dépasser les limites. C'est pourquoi les rêves de l'indigène sont des rêves agressifs', and he explains: 'Cette agressivité sédimentée dans ses muscles, le colonisé va la manifester d'abord contre les siens' (p. 18). He adds further:

Au niveau des individus, on assiste à une véritable négation du bon sens. Alors que le colon ou le policier peuvent, à longueur de journée, frapper le colonisé, l'insulter, le faire mettre à genoux, on verra le colonisé sortir son couteau au moindre regard hostile ou agressif d'un autre colonisé. Car la dernière ressource du colonisé est de défendre sa personnalité face à son congénère. [...] En se lançant à muscles perdus dans ses vengeances, le colonisé tente de se persuader que le colonialisme n'existe pas [...] (*Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 20).

And of course *la congénère* – since Fanon seems to have male subjects primarily in mind here – is often the first target of the colonised man's fury.

Interestingly, the Puerto Rican René Marqués likewise refers to the violence of the colonised. He notes that if Puerto Ricans have bouts of aggressiveness, these are always counterproductive and symptomatic of 'una violencia por desesperación' (*El puertorriqueño dócil*, p. 160). In a passage strikingly reminiscent of Fanon's words quoted above, he comments in relation to Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's story on the Korean War 'El soldado Damián':

Damián Sánchez, [...] víctima a manos de sus compañeros y oficiales norteamericanos, en vez de reaccionar contra éstos, desahoga su furia, de modo aparentemente ilógico, golpeando injusta, viciosa y cruelmente a su amigo coreano, único ser a quien puede en ese momento considerar más débil o 'inferior' que él mismo (*El puertorriqueño dócil*, p. 160).

He adds:

El ejemplo señalado nos da la clave de por qué una sociedad 'pacífica' y 'tolerante' como lo es la puertorriqueña puede producir una literatura de violencia. Los actos violentos de los personajes literarios [...] no son, en último análisis, producto de una doctrina revolucionaria, [...] sino más bien de la desesperación de seres débiles y dóciles acorralados en el último reducto de la dignidad humana.

Besides this blind violence against their own counterparts, Marqués also points out the Puerto Ricans' inclination to self-destruction ('su impulso autodestructor'), and their suicidal behaviour ('su tendencia suicida'); this, he notes, is amply reflected in the national literature, notably in Díaz Valcárcel. Marqués further clarifies the connection between self-inflicted violence and the lack of political power of the colonised: 'Este reprimir o inhibir el normal impulso agresor hacia los demás, para dirigirlo morbosamente hacia sí mismo [...] es una característica de seres y pueblos dóciles (léase ñangotados, tolerantes, "democráticos")' (p. 161). To illustrate his point he refers to several texts dealing with nationalism, in which action (or nationalist activism) invariably drives the protagonist to self-destruction, whether physical (e.g. death) or psychological (e.g. madness). Thus for Marqués, the message contained in local writing is clear: in a colony like Puerto Rico, the nationalist struggle has always led and can only ever lead to self-destruction. This literary representation of national politics, he remarks, is in accordance with reality: pro-autonomy activists in Puerto Rico have always displayed suicidal behaviour. And the same applies to annexation supporters, who, as Marqués sees it, seek in the integration to the US a collective suicide in political, social and cultural terms.

Marqués regards the counterproductive violence expressed by Puerto Ricans as a form of docility, whose causes he had analysed in an earlier essay, 'El ruido y la furia de los críticos del Sr. Kazin' (1960).<sup>14</sup> While in this essay Marqués concedes to Kazin that the Puerto Ricans are indeed docile, unlike him he does not reach the conclusion that this feature is intrinsic, a sort of genetic trait of the population. Instead, he identifies the root cause of such docility as the political situation of the island: its lack of political autonomy and the fierce ideological brainwashing of its population by the colonial power. Marqués, therefore, reaches similar conclusions to Fanon: the colonised people offload their frustration onto their counterparts or against themselves, rather than onto the oppressor. Their indulgence in gratuitous, violent acts is in fact an attempt to mask the surrounding political reality.

Many women writers refer to this phenomenon of the reproduction of oppression by the oppressed in their texts. In Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit...*, for instance, it is Zétou's mother – herself a black woman and as such familiar with the ongoing exploitation suffered by her counterparts in the Caribbean – who once in Paris decides to treat her daughter as her servant and engineers her sexual abuse. In the later novel *Juletane*, the protagonist directs her violence against her co-wives, or fellow victims, rather than at her husband Mamadou, the real source of her suffering. The reproduction of oppression by the oppressed is also present in the works by Gisèle Pineau and Edwidge Danticat examined in chapter one, as well as in Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie, as discussed in the previous section. In these texts women are almost invariably the victims of men, most of whom are themselves victims of society.

Warner-Vieyra's novels present a significant difference from Pineau's, however, in that they make an explicit connection between the violence of the protagonist and his/her alienation as a colonised subject, an alienation manifesting itself in the form of a troubled sense of identity: Zétou's mother is portrayed as a completely alienated person whose love for her children is dictated by their complexion, and whose main aim in life is to whiten herself. The growth of Juletane's sense of identity, on the

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<sup>14</sup> In *El puertorriqueño dócil y otros ensayos*, pp. 117-132. Marqués's earlier essay was written in response to an article by the continental literary critic Alfred Kazin contending that the Puerto Ricans are a docile people. Understandably, the apparition of Kazin's article in the local press in February 1960 fuelled a controversy among the island's intellectual circles.



other hand, has been thwarted by external events: an orphan at an early age, she was first uprooted from her native land; following her marriage she then became an expatriate abruptly immersed in an alien culture. In both examples, therefore, the protagonists' violence is shown to have roots in their alienation. This process can be said to work both ways in *Juletane*, since the character's alienation, climaxing in her madness, emanates from the (psychological) violence she endures, which in turn triggers her violent actions.

Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* echoes Warner-Vieyra's first novel: here too, a mother is shown to take part in the exploitation of her daughter, albeit with less awareness than in Warner-Vieyra. Martine exerts total control over her daughter Sophie's life, and particularly over her sexuality. From the moment Sophie is dating a man, she has to submit to regular virginity checks. Here again, there is an implicit connection between the protagonist's use of violence and her alienation resulting from her position as a colonised subject. For Martine, this alienation is reflected in madness and in a severe lactification complex. She actually plays both the parts of the victim and the victimiser in the novel: although raped at the age of sixteen, Martine inflicts a form of repeated rape onto Sophie through her painful and humiliating *tests*.

Such ruthless treatment derives from Martine's fierce determination to turn Sophie into a successful Haitian exile. This Sophie is to achieve first of all via a bourgeois career – she is to attend medical school. On the very day of her arrival, before she even reaches her mother's home, Sophie is told:

You are going to work hard here [...] and no one is going to break your heart because you cannot read or write. You have a chance to become the kind of woman Atie and I have always wanted to be. If you make something of yourself in life, we will all succeed. You can *raise our heads* (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, p. 44).

Yet the intensity of Martine's determination, which leads her to act to the detriment of her daughter's self-fulfilment, is in turn indicative of her psychological disorder. During the years spent in Haiti subsequent to the rape, Martine is subject to suicidal thoughts. These only fade once she leaves for New York. But they never disappear and Martine is prone to terrible nightmares every night. Atie comments: 'Martine's head is not in the best condition' (p. 103), while Martine repeats on several occasions: 'I am trying to keep one step ahead of a mental hospital' (p. 191). As for Sophie, she describes her mother and herself as 'frightened insomniac[s]' (p. 193).

Despite her own suffering, as noted in chapter one Martine nevertheless stands as the antithesis of the conventional, nurturing Caribbean mother. Her contraction of breast cancer and subsequent amputation of both breasts are emblematic of her unnatural mothering role: her domineering behaviour clearly does not allow for the (psychological) nurturing and growth of Sophie. The extent of Martine's alienation is revealed when she shows Sophie the large doll she has been keeping as a substitute for her: 'She is like a friend to me. She kept me company while we were apart. It seems crazy, I know. A grown woman like me with a doll' (p. 45).

What is most significant about the doll, however, is that her appearance betrays Martine's ambitions for Sophie: not only is it 'well-dressed', but it is also 'caramel-colored with a fine pointing nose' (p. 44). Martine's wish for whitening is thus visible in the doll she chooses to replicate Sophie. She hopes to fulfil her wish not simply by turning Sophie into a professional, but also through an advantageous marriage to a Haitian upper-class exile, preferably mulatto. Here there is a direct link between Martine's urge to whiten socially and physically via Sophie, and her reproduction of oppression, through the manipulation of her daughter's sexuality: Sophie's virginity is indeed the key to her mother's social aspirations, the prerequisite for any woman wishing to enter the Haitian elite.

But, as in the cases of psychological disorder analysed by the Martiniquan and Puerto Rican theoreticians, Martine's misguided violence is not only directed against her daughter; her desire for whiteness also leads her to inflict violence upon herself. Clearly, Martine – just like Zétou's mother in Warner-Vieyra's novel – only conceives social advancement through whitening.<sup>15</sup> This she hopes to achieve both literally, by applying bleaching cream to her face, and in a more figurative sense, through miscegenation. Thus – while Zétou's mother abandons her family for a white man – Martine aspires to upper class mulatto companions for herself and her daughter, and engages in a relationship with Marc. In addition, Martine adopts the dominant values of the two worlds she knows: those of the Francophile Haitian elite and the US white Anglo-Saxons. For instance, although Creole is her native tongue and the language she uses with her family, the message on her answerphone is delivered in 'impeccable French and English, both painfully mastered', so that, Sophie reflects, 'her voice would never betray the fact that she grew up without a

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<sup>15</sup> The connection between whitening and social advancement is discussed shortly.

father, that her mother was merely a peasant, that she was *from the hills*' (p. 223, italics in the original). Here Sophie unequivocally recognises the process of lactification to which her mother submits them both as a form of self-inflicted violence.

Furthermore, as will be further discussed in the next chapter, the text implies that it is Martine's self-denial that leads her to suicide. Her skin-lightening through bleaching creams foreshadows her end. When Sophie, Martine, Atie and the grandmother Ifé all reunite in Haiti, Sophie reflects upon her mother's arrival: 'It had been almost two years since the last time we saw each other. My mother's skin was unusually light, a pale mocha, three or four shades lighter than any of ours' (p. 159). While light skin is a sign of prosperity and social advancement to Martine, to Sophie, it unmistakably evokes sickness, both physical and mental. Later on, it is Ifé who remarks on her daughter's skin colour:

'Your skin looks lighter', said my grandmother. Is it *prodwi*? You use something?'

My mother looked embarrassed.

'It is very cold in America', my mother said. The cold turns us into ghosts.'

'Papa Shango, the sun here, will change that,' my grandmother said.

'I am not staying long enough for that,' my mother said. (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, p. 160)

Too embarrassed to acknowledge her alienation, Martine lies about the cause of her paleness. The confrontation with Ifé sets out Martine's denial of her cultural roots: significantly, Ifé instinctively calls on her cultural heritage (Papa Shango) to protect her daughter and restore her health. Yet, as indicated by her intention to pay only a brief visit, Martine is shown to reject this black Haitian heritage (symbolised by her dark skin and vaudou), in order to emulate Haitian mulatto values. Although Martine's attitude is diametrically opposite to that of Dracius-Pinalie's Rehvana discussed in the previous section, it is in fact comparable. Both indulge in a self-denial that results in psychological and physical destruction. The Martiniquan and Haitian authors agree with Fanon that both behaviours are characteristic of subjects who are equally mistaken in their identity quest.

Danticat's novel therefore suggests that the lactification complex described by Fanon is not restricted to the Antilles that remain dependent, but can affect all post-colonial societies: lactification is in fact the result of a rigid social stratification according to colour inherited from the colonial system. It is engrained in the region, and if it persists even in Haiti – a country that broke away from the French yoke and

expelled virtually all whites two centuries ago – it is because, here as elsewhere in the Caribbean, independence alone was not enough to eradicate social inequalities based on colour. Thus the Haitian ruling class remains today divided between the blacks and the mulattos. Similar conclusions can be reached with regard to other recent texts from the nominally independent Caribbean.<sup>16</sup> That such a situation is not restricted to the specific social set-up of the region, but typical of the colonial and postcolonial world is attested by the fact that in 1952 Fanon could find comparable psychological damage in two female characters Mayotte and Nini, respectively from a Martiniquan and Senegalese novel. Significantly, Martinique and Senegal were at the time the oldest two French colonial outposts in the Americas and West Africa:

Qu'il se soit agi de Mayotte Capécia la Martiniquaise ou de Nini la Saint-Louisienne, le même processus s'est retrouvé. Processus bilatéral, tentative de recouvrement – par intériorisation – de valeurs originellement interdites. C'est parce que la négresse se sent inférieure qu'elle aspire à se faire admettre dans le monde blanc (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 48).

Many critics were to remark decades later that Fanon's failure to assess the difference that gender makes in the configuration of the Caribbean lactification complex is a major shortcoming in his analysis.<sup>17</sup> Despite the Martiniquan thinker's 'gender blindness', many Caribbean women writers in the 1990s have still found his theory relevant. Apart from writers such as Edwidge Danticat and Loida Maritza Pérez, as might be expected, the majority seem to originate from the dependent Caribbean, the DOMs and Puerto Rico. Cases in point are Warner-Vieyra's and Dracius-Pinalie's fiction discussed above. But it is perhaps in Puerto Rico that most women writers have opened a dialogue with Fanon, as illustrated by Alba Nydia Ambert's *Porque hay silencio*, Alba Nydia Rivera Ramos's 'Blanca mas cara' in *La Danza Vital: Cuentos Fanonmenales*<sup>18</sup>, and Mayra Santos's 'Hebra rota' in *Pez de vidrio*. These authors are all familiar with Fanon's writing. In the case of psychologist Rivera Ramos, this is made explicit in the pun of the subtitle.

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<sup>16</sup> *Geographies of Home* (US: Viking Putnam, 1999), a novel by the Dominican-American Loida Maritza Pérez, provides another case of lactification complex in the contemporary, independent Caribbean. The character Marina is obsessed with light complexion and purity, both of which equate, she believes. This drives her to commit suicide after being the victim of rape.

<sup>17</sup> See among others 'Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary Women Writers', by Clarisse Zimra, 'The gendering of *créolité*', by A. James Arnold, 'Anti-black Femininity and Mixed-race Identity: Engaging Fanon to Reread Capécia', by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renée T. White, Cambridge, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, pp. 155-162, and *Mayotte Capécia ou l'aliénation selon Fanon* (Paris, Karthala, 1999), by Christiane P. Makward.

<sup>18</sup> San Juan: Centro Para el Desarrollo de la Personalidad Puertorriqueña (CEDEPP), 1993.

Although there is no indication that any of these Puerto Rican authors is familiar with Warner-Vieyra's fiction,<sup>19</sup> the plot and structural similarities between Ambert's *Porque hay silencio* and *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit...*, published only six years earlier, are striking. Just like Warner-Vieyra's novel, *Porque hay silencio* opens with the main character (Blanca) awakening in a mental hospital after a suicide attempt. There follows an account of the lifelong abuse she endured, causing her eventual mental breakdown. Brief episodes focusing on the present introduce the reader to female inmates who all have similar stories to Blanca's to tell. In this novel, too, the process of reproduction of oppression operates, since although they are by no means sympathetic characters, all of Blanca's abusers can nonetheless invoke mitigating circumstances: as unemployed, petty criminals, old people without pensions, and so on, they are rejects of the system. Thus Ambert implies that the alienation of her protagonist is not simply individual, but symptomatic of Puerto Rican society at large. Coinciding with Fanon – whose influence is acknowledged with the mention that his theory on violence is the topic Blanca chooses for her dissertation – the author suggests that the colonial state of the island is chiefly responsible for the psychological disorders that frequently afflict Puerto Ricans, and which are clearly the product of their alienation. Chapter 6 in *Porque hay silencio* begins with the following paragraph:

Los puertorriqueños padecen de una dolencia preponderante y peculiar llamada nervios. Desde la depresión hasta la epilepsia, los llamados nervios arropan a todos los males mentales y físicos de esta población como manta protectora sagrada. Los nervios se manifiestan en ataques acometiendo misteriosamente a los afligidos causando apoplejía, sacudidas espásticas y síntomas diversos. [...] todo puertorriqueño, tarde o temprano, personalmente o vicariamente, tiene alguna experiencia con el padecimiento incomprensible (p. 58).

Given that, as examined above, René Marqués elaborates a theory similar to Frantz Fanon's on the violence and alienation of the colonised, and at roughly the same period, it is perhaps surprising that these three Puerto Rican women writers should all refer to Fanon rather than their own compatriot in their fiction. It may well be that they find the Martiniquan's thinking more appropriate than Marqués's because of its added dimension of race. Indeed, the only reference to race in 'El puertorriqueño dócil' is Marqués's very debatable statement regarding the position of pro-annexation black Puerto Ricans. In Marqués's view such a position is

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<sup>19</sup> In fact Rivera Ramos was unaware of the existence of Myriam Warner-Vieyra when she wrote the story.

paradoxical, since the black Puerto Ricans are thus supporting the political assimilation of an island with minor racial problems by the viciously racist US:

Nacido en una cultura donde el prejuicio racial se ha mantenido, en este siglo de cruentos conflictos, a un nivel muy bajo, lucha desesperada y suicidamente por destruir esos patrones culturales de humana convivencia para incorporar su país a una cultura foránea donde el prejuicio actual contra el negro alcanza niveles de odio, crueldad y salvajismo jamás experimentados por la sociedad puertorriqueña contemporánea (*El puertorriqueño dócil*, p. 166).

As his compatriot and contemporary José Luis González was to comment a few years later, Marqués largely minimises the extent of racial prejudice in Puerto Rico.<sup>20</sup> His analysis also fails to take into account the difference between southern and northern United States regarding the racial issue. If many Afro-Puerto Ricans align themselves politically with the US despite the strong segregationist tradition of the South, González suggests, it is because they take as a reference the Northern states, which actually have a longer abolitionist and integrationist tradition than the island. As he points out, it was in the northern United States that nineteenth-century black Puerto Rican leaders like José Celso Barbosa got their education: at the time, they had no such prospect in Spain, where only the sons of white landowners were sent to study, and even less so at home, since Spain fiercely opposed the opening of a local university (*El país de cuatro pisos*, pp. 35-36).

If race is actually not a prominent factor in Ambert's novel, this issue is central to the texts by Rivera Ramos and Santos. Both bear a stronger relation to *Peau noire, masques blancs* and the psychological violence it describes, than to the more obvious brutality analysed in *Les Damnés de la terre*. Rivera Ramos's 'Blanca mas cara' recounts the story of a poor, black Puerto Rican girl who strives to adopt a white (meaning, in her eyes, opulent) lifestyle by denying her racial and cultural origins. The story engages in a dialogue with Fanon right from the title: 'Blanca mas cara' is a pun on 'blanca máscara', from the Spanish title for *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Here alienation is not coupled with physical suffering, but with the psychological violence stemming both from the socio-economic marginalisation of

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<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, the majority of Afro-Puerto Ricans remain today excluded from economic and political power, and their representation in the mass media is minimal. Furthermore, the official discourse continues to deny their existence: the day has yet to come, for instance, when Puerto Rico sends a black candidate to the Miss Universe contest, as attested by the national selection in 1999, where a black finalist lost to an obviously less qualified, particularly pale-skinned white rival, which aroused a controversy around the racial prejudices of such contests, and more crucially, around the self-image Puerto Rico is promoting abroad.

the character – she is black and poor –, and the colonial situation of her country – whose elite, including Blanca once she has ‘made it’, continues to look towards Europe. In this Rivera Ramos follows Fanon, for whom the inferiority complex suffered by many black Antilleans, driving them to deny their blackness and aspire to whitening, has at its basis economic injustice:

Le Noir qui entre en France change parce que pour lui la métropole représente le Tabernacle; il change non seulement parce que c’est de là que lui sont venus Montesquieu, Rousseau et Voltaire, mais *parce que c’est de là que lui viennent les médecins, les chefs de service, les innombrables petits potentats* – depuis le sergent-chef ‘quinze ans de service’ jusqu’au gendarme originaire de Panissières (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 18, emphasis added).

In his second chapter, Fanon also comments on an assertion by Mayotte Capécia in *Je suis martiniquaise* that sheds light on the connection between whiteness and opulence and power in Caribbean societies: ‘C’est à Didier, boulevard des richissimes Martiniquais, que vont les désirs de la belle [Mayotte]. Et c’est elle qui le dit: on est blanc à partir d’un certain nombre de millions’ (p. 35).

In the mind of many Antilleans, therefore, blackness (or, more accurately, non-whiteness, given the multiracial nature of Caribbean societies) is synonymous with poverty and lack of social prospects. It is crucial to interpret the widespread desire for whiteness in the Caribbean in this context in order to understand it fully. Thus in Rivera Ramos’s story, everything about Blanca – just as for Danticat’s Martine – suggests self-denial, starting with her name. Admittedly, this name was given to her; it is nonetheless revealing of the protagonist’s (or her family’s) aspirations to *whiten the race*, that is, to go up in society. Equally indicative is the protagonist’s use of bleaching creams. Consequently, when Blanca manages to marry a white man, the whole family rejoices: ‘toda su familia [...] estaría super orgullosa y feliz de tener un miembro blanco y rubio’ (*Cuentos Fanonmenales*, p. 29). Blanca’s alienation from her class and her race is evident during her wedding celebration: ‘alquiló el más famoso salón en un área exclusiva de San Juan, para que pudieran acudir sus amigos blancos de la alta ‘alcurnia’; aunque sus negros familiares no pudieran asistir’ (*Cuentos Fanonmenales*, p. 29). This passage also denotes the persistence of race and class segregation in Puerto Rican society.

Not only is Blanca anxious to whiten, but she is also terrified by the idea of having a child darker than herself, which she sees as a regression. Here again, the text is in keeping with Fanonian theory: as Fanon explains in relation to Mayotte, ‘il

faut blanchir la race; cela, toutes les Martiniquaises le savent, le disent, le répètent. Blanchir la race, sauver la race...' (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 38). For Blanca, the urge to whiten is such that the birth of her dark-skinned daughter drives her to attempt infanticide; she does not survive the shock of failing in her enterprise. The final words of the story again comment on Puerto Rican society: 'Azabache creció y vivió, cultivando su ingenio, para trastocar aquel mundo injusto en el que su madre no pudo vivir' (*Cuentos Fanonmenales*, p. 31).

Like Dracius-Pinalie and Ambert (as well as Danticat), Mayra Santos presents in 'Hebra rota' an explicit link between domestic violence and cultural – as well as political – alienation. Nevertheless, the two Puerto Rican authors seem to come to conclusions opposite to those of their Martiniquan counterpart, an obvious defender of political assimilation. 'Hebra rota' focuses on Yetsaida, a black teenager from a deprived suburb, and doña Kety, the owner of a neighbouring 'beauty parlor', whom Yetsaida visits assiduously to have her hair 'relaxed'. Violence is a leitmotiv in the story, right from the opening words: 'Una niña y un padre y un sueño y una memoria rota como una nariz a los diez años con aliento de alcohol encima' (*Pez de vidrio*, p. 65). Allusions to broken noses recur throughout; not only Yetsaida, but her mother and the beautician Kety, are or were abused by their fathers or husbands: 'como todas las otras mujeres del barrio [doña Kety] tiene la nariz rota a puñetazos' (p. 66). Yet the story does not simply allude to domestic violence through the mention of broken noses, it also provides a graphic depiction of it: '[el] padre que llega a la calle tropezando, que le grita, a quien ella le grita para atrás, que la persigue para darle y la agarra por el cuello, que hace llorar a la mamá, que se agarra la nariz por si acaso se suelta un puño – ¿De quién? – La gritería aturde tanto; la sangre aturde tanto' (p. 67).

The psychological violence presented in 'Hebra rota', however, is perhaps even more extreme than the brutality depicted above. The story reveals the social expectations of lactification inflicted on Afro-Puerto Ricans, notably through the aesthetic canons imposed by the media. In addition to the works by Fanon and Marqués discussed above, there is a third subtext to the story. The opening words refer to Arcadio Díaz Quiñones's 'La memoria rota' (1991). In this essay, Díaz Quiñones argues that the Puerto Rican elite has elaborated an exclusivist notion of Puerto Rican identity, to the detriment of the blacks, the working class and the emigrants:



Esos prejuicios clasistas y culturales son compartidos por sectores de la propia élite puertorriqueña que sostienen una concepción monolítica y vertical del nacionalismo 'cultural'. Reproducen a menudo ese rechazo, esas dicotomías y las exclusiones. Se creen depositarios de la 'verdadera' identidad nacional y consideran intolerable la complejidad de los mezclados o 'asimilados', un atentado a la pureza del ser.

Antes era la extrañeza ante el 'jíbaro' o la otredad del mundo afropuertorriqueño. [...] La Otredad – y la intolerancia – comienzan en casa, profundamente condicionadas por la ideología colonial. Es el lenguaje del poder – internalizado en la colonia – dispuesto a una especie de higiene social (*La memoria rota*, p. 80).

Following on Díaz Quiñones, Santos denounces this imposition of an identity construct that excludes a large section of the population in her story. Such identity constructs are seen as largely responsible for the continuing alienation of Afro-Puerto Ricans. Thus Yetsaida imagines herself as one of those girls in the numerous advertisements for black hair products she has seen on TV: 'el beauty de doña Kety queda alto, alto en el cielo como un pájaro de cemento que transporta hacia la belleza. [...] Una se baja del pájaro lacia, bella. El viento juega con los cabellos como en los sueños Breck, como en los anuncios de Mirta de Perales' (*Pez de vidrio*, p. 66). In fact, all the images presented by the media conform to the same aesthetic norms: 'doña Kety y ella han dado la vida al culto por la belleza de verdad, la que es cierta y sale por las pantallas y por los anuncios que sabemos que son para que una compre pampers y ropa mala de Me Salvé pero que se joda. La belleza es cierta' (p. 68).

Here, unlike in the texts discussed above, the lactification complex does not so much focus on skin complexion as on hair texture: the protagonists are obsessed with straight hair. The protagonists' acceptance of this dominant aesthetic canon is total: to Yetsaida 'lacia' (that is, with straight hair) is synonymous with 'bella'. Consequently, a dark skin can only be redeemed with straight hair: 'Doña Kety, tan elegante, es prieta, sí. –Pero esa hermosa mata de pelo lacio y pintado de color chavito que le cae por los hombros–' (p. 66, emphasis added). The extent of psychological pressure is such that four-year old girls already want to have their hair straightened: 'Doña Kety [...] ya no acepta domarle las pasas a las prietitas de cuatro años [...] ninfitas de caserío que a los cuatro saben ya de tufos y pujos y condones secos en la esquina de las aceras y quieren alisarse el pelo para no ser tan prietas y tan feas y tan cafres' (p. 65). Here via racist stereotypes, blackness becomes automatically synonymous with ugliness and savagery. To Yetsaida, this internalisation of the dominant Eurocentric aesthetics is extremely damaging. She is convinced that her parents dislike her because of her kinky hair: 'El padre ni le toca

las pasas del asco, sí, del asco. Ella se lo ha visto en la cara, en los chistes de la mano enredada, en el fastidio de Mami peinándola entre gritos con la peinilla mellá' (p. 67). In such a context, Yetsaida's wish for straight, blond hair is not surprising: 'amarillo pollito como ella quisiera tener el pelo. Y lacio, lacio, lacio' (p. 67).

Yet the story does not insist so much on the physical and psychological violence of which the protagonists are victim, as on the psychological torture to which they submit themselves, through their internalisation of the lactification complex. Hair straightening clearly figures in the text as an act of violence: doña Kety bears a 'mapamundi' of scars on her forearm, as a result of the times she got burnt by the hot comb. In fact, her broken nose and her 'mapamundi' are doña Kety's two characteristics, and they are always associated in the text. The character is first described in these terms: 'Doña Kety tiene la nariz rota de un puñetazo, un mapamundi de quemaduras en el antebrazo...' (p. 65), and further on: 'La nariz rota de doña Kety, el mapamundi de su antebrazo izquierdo y sus rolos' (p. 66). The physical damage produced by the act of hair straightening – the burns – only underlines the psychological damage implicit in the logic of lactification.

In the story, therefore, physical violence (inflicted by the father or/and husband) and psychological violence (imposed by the media) go hand in hand with self-inflicted psychological (and partly physical) violence (incurred by the desire for whitening). All three forms of violence are omnipresent in doña Kety's and Yetsaida's lives, and they are bound together in the title, 'Hebra rota', reminiscent of the expression 'nariz rota' that recurs throughout the story. The text relies on an opposition between 'nariz rota' and 'pelo lacio', emblematic respectively of the world the protagonists want to escape, and the one to which they aspire. Indeed, just like doña Kety, Yetsaida wants to dedicate her life to the 'culto de la belleza': she dreams of becoming an acclaimed model.

As in the texts analysed above, the significance of 'Hebra rota' lies in its suggestion that doña Kety and Yetsaida are not isolated cases, but symptomatic of the colonial society in which they live. The mention of the opening of a centre for psychiatric treatment nearby, precisely as the protagonists are engaged in the action of hair straightening, can be interpreted as a direct allusion to the Fanonian theory of alienation, more specifically here, of the lactification complex from which the colonised suffers. In accordance with Fanon and Marqués, the violence that the protagonists direct against themselves (the burns and hair straightening) is explicitly

linked to the violence that is inflicted upon them (domestic violence), which is in itself the misguided expression of the colonised's alienation, stemming in turn from the violence of colonisation (the imposition of aesthetic and cultural values that leads them to self-denial): 'Se ríe, ríen juntas la neófita y doña Kety mientras el sol se desangra por la barriada que ahora estrena un centro de tratamiento psiquiátrico al lado. La mano experta se posa ahora en la nariz rota de Yetsaida. -Ah, tú también-. -Sí-. Y doña Kety siente algo como una cosquillita del pasado correrle por el mapamundi del antebrazo' (p. 70). The logic of reproduction of repression of the colonised is thus a vicious circle from which there is no escape.

By adding the variables of race and gender, Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Santos's 'Hebra rota' – as well as the other texts mentioned above – therefore establish a fruitful dialogue with decolonisation thinkers such as Fanon and Marqués.

### **In praise of Caribbeanness: pan-Caribbeanism in women's fiction**

In her overview of women writers from the Hispanic Caribbean, María Cristina Rodríguez notes the fragmentation of the archipelago, and stresses that since (as theorised by Nancy Chodorow) women traditionally define their identity in relation to others, unlike men whose sense of identity is usually defined in terms of rupture, one of the directions Caribbean women's writing should take is precisely to restore its unity to a region that has been artificially compartmented by (neo)-colonialism. This is certainly what some of the most successful women writers such as Ana Lydia Vega, Mayra Montero and Maryse Condé do in their fiction, as do lesser-known authors like Marta Rojas, Micheline Dusseck and Sylviane Telchid. They emphasise the pattern of migration that has always characterised the area and shaped a rich common cultural heritage. These migrations have been fundamental in the making of the Caribbean as a region where the various islands are bound historically, culturally, socially, as well as economically and politically.

The introduction discussed how since the nineteenth century the notion of Antillean Confederation has been primarily conceived by (male) Caribbean writers and thinkers as a political imperative: this has been deemed the only viable solution to ensure a meaningful independence for the countries of the region, in the face of a

growing US imperialism. This section looks at the way pan-Caribbeanism is envisioned in Hispanic and Francophone women's fiction, notably in the form of intra-regional immigration.

Dedicated to 'la confederación caribeña del futuro', Ana Lydia Vega's *Encancaranublado* champions pan-Caribbeanism. The collection reveals a concern for the lack of solidarity among Antilleans, and implies that without unity, the Caribbean will remain under control of the West. 'Jamaica Farewell' precisely takes up this point: the representatives of the Caribbean States, excluding communist Cuba and Grenada, meet in Kingston to discuss the potentiality of a Confederation, but the project is jeopardised by internal rivalries. The ending, in which the Martiniquan representative is mugged by a Jamaican, also seems to suggest that the advocates of a Confederation need to implement policies that would really improve the Antilleans' conditions rather than produce political rhetoric. Vega shows in other stories the pernicious effects of chauvinism and socio-cultural prejudices. This is nowhere more evident than in 'Encancaranublado', in which despite ending up 'on the same boat', the three men (a Haitian, a Dominican and a Cuban) trying to reach the United States nearly drown because of a quarrel that overturns their precarious raft. Thus Vega suggests that divisions such as the long-standing hatred between Haitians and Dominicans, or the contempt Puerto Ricans and Cubans have for their neighbours, will lead the region to its downfall. The end of the story, where a Puerto Rican takes care of the three survivors, shows how on the contrary solidarity would benefit all Antilleans, thus demonstrating the veracity in the motto 'strength in unity'.

Condé's *La Vie scélérate* is also truly pan-Caribbean in scope, encompassing in fact the whole of the New World Black Diaspora. The novel denounces the long-term exploitation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, facing high mortality rates in sugar fields or on large-scale projects such as the Panama Canal. Albert Louis's departure for Panama triggers a lethal cycle of emigration and exile in one of the family branches: his son Bert, who leaves for France, and Bert's son Bébert, who never sees Guadeloupe, both eventually commit suicide. But it is Albert's granddaughter Thécla who figures as the eternal wanderer in the novel: her odyssey takes her to Paris, the United States, and around the Caribbean. Albert, Thécla and to a lesser extent Jacob travel because they are anxious to belong: Thécla's pan-Caribbean 'wandering', for instance, is in fact a restless quest for a home. If Albert and

Thécla's multiculturalism is valued in the text, it is shown to remain an exception in the family. The other characters are static, rooted in their native land. Crucially, most are proud of being pure 'nègres' and fear a 'whitening of the race': Bert is ostracised for marrying a white woman, and other interracial unions in the family likewise meet strong disapproval, particularly from Jacob. This phobia of cultural and ethnic *métissage* is shown largely to account for the narrow-mindedness of the Louis. So Condé's pan-Caribbean vision does not rest only on an economic necessity for the collectivity, it also expresses a need for individuals to get out. This point will be taken up in the final chapter.

If Vega's pan-Caribbeanism has a strong political basis, it is envisaged as an economic solution for the archipelago too, both because a united Caribbean market seems the most viable solution to guarantee some economic independence to the countries of the region, and because, on a more basic level, emigration from one island to another is for many the fastest and most accessible way to better their standard of living. The same economic argument is found in Condé, as well as in the other two authors discussed here. *El columpio de Rey Spencer*, by the Cuban Marta Rojas, is an avowed tribute to the fifth centenary of Columbus's first voyage to America. Through the story of Clara Spencer, a Jamaican immigrant, the novel depicts the migration patterns within the Caribbean, and more specifically to Cuba in the early 1920s. Like Condé, Rojas reveals the discrimination and exploitation endured by Afro-Caribbean immigrants (mostly Haitians and Jamaicans coming as cane-cutters), and notably she denounces the official policy aiming to prevent 'la africanización de Cuba', described as 'una acción maledicente y discriminativa continuada, en contra de la entrada en Cuba de "personas de color" provenientes de las islas vecinas, a quienes se les responsabilizaba de introducir en el país [enfermedades]. Desde hacía como diez años la difamación racista, a todas luces, contaba con tribunas parlamentarias y con el apoyo de la prensa...' (*El columpio de Rey Spencer*, p. 67).

Thus she relates the tragic episode of Cayo Duan, during which in December 1922 several Afro-Caribbean immigrants, Jamaicans and Haitians in quarantine in Cuba, were massacred by the drunken guards. Not only did the crime remain unpunished but, Rojas implies, it was tacitly approved by the Cuban Government. Yet these immigrants play a vital role in the economy, and the *hacendados*

pressurise and bribe the politicians to guarantee the influx of *braceros*: ‘Los colonos y hacendados hacían oídos sordos con respecto a la “inmigración antisanitaria” cada vez que comenzaba la zafra azucarera [...] por la alta productividad demostrada y la mano de obra tan barata’ (pp. 67-68). The exploitation of the *braceros* is evidenced in their severe physical and psychological deterioration: ‘enfermos mentales e indigentes [...] sin trabajo ni atención médica’ (p. 71) are deported back to their country when no longer needed. As for Jamaican women, many take jobs as nannies, where again they are underpaid and overworked. Racial discrimination and social prejudices are embedded in 1920s Santiago de Cuba, which is categorised with Puerto Rico as an ‘isla de castas’, where for instance private beaches are prohibited to blacks. One night when Clara goes to a ball with the Cuban doctor Cassamajour, she is publicly humiliated for being a black Jamaican. As she retreats, two ladies comment: ‘Esa debe heder a ácido muriático, ¡qué gente más cochina!’ (p. 115). Such an insistence on racial discrimination in the novel is certainly political, as this situation is implicitly contrasted with post-Revolutionary Cuba.

It is this setting of a xenophobic and racist Cuba that Rojas chooses in order to advocate a Caribbeanness to which the African element is central. The choice of Santiago is particularly propitious to such ends, since this area of Cuba has a long tradition of Caribbean immigration, and the cultural influence of Haiti and Jamaica in particular is very noticeable. Rojas’s Caribbeanness pervades various aspects of the book. Firstly, using the same symbolism as Vega in ‘Encancaranublado’, Rojas makes the ship *La Elizabeth*, on which her protagonists travel to Cuba, a microcosm of the Caribbean. The sixty-plus passengers originate from various islands and are of different ethnicity and colour: although most of them are Haitians and Jamaicans intending to work as *braceros* in Santiago, there are also Barbadians and Puerto Ricans, and towards the end of the journey three Cuban *carboneros* get on board. As for the crew, it includes Barbadians, Puerto Ricans and the captain is Dominican. In addition, the boat travels around the archipelago, including to Martinique, from where the Barbadian boatswain, Hamilton Nelson, claims to bring back goods for his girlfriend. Each island and passenger is thus characterised, at times somewhat stereotypically: the Haitians play drums and practise Vaudou; a Jamaican intends to salt the product of his fishing to cook ackee and salt fish (regardless of whether the fish is cod or not); Martinique is presented as the Caribbean capital of French refinement, etc.

Despite this stereotyping of some characters and islands, Rojas frequently points to the cultural differences between the passengers, in particular in relation to their tongue: translation from Spanish to English (done by Clara or the Puerto Ricans) is necessary for the Jamaicans; nobody else on the ship speaks good French or French Creole, so that the Haitians are left without explanation regarding most of the events occurring during the journey: 'Un marinero barbadense [describía] la travesía mirando hacia la proa. Su información era en verdad apreciada por los antillanos angloparlantes, no así por los haitianos, que no lo entendían' (p. 25). The text also points to the cultural differences existing within a same nationality, due to class. Thus unlike his compatriots – all Creole-speaking and Vaudou adepts – the Haitian Fernando Maxsú Profet 'hijo de un ex-alcalde de Port-au-Prince' (p. 29) speaks French and is a Catholic.

Furthermore, the events happening during the journey mirror the prejudices and 'hierarchy' prevailing among Antilleans, with Haiti at the bottom and Cuba at the top. A Haitian is accused of killing a sick, white Cuban child, when in reality he attempted to save his life:

Ercít Didit tomó al niño blanco entre sus manos y pegó los labios a su boca dándole respiración. [...] pero los pulmones del niño no respondieron, y murió pegado a su boca. Un marinero de la goleta gritó histérico: '¡lo mató el haitiano, lo mató el haitiano!', otros gruñidos semejantes corearon la voz del marinero (p. 50).

The Cuban immigration officer informed of the incident subsequently throws the young Haitian overboard, feeding him to the sharks. Ercít Didit thus dies a victim of the others' ignorance and fear of Vaudou, but most of all at the hands of the racist Cuban officer. The tragic episode echoes Vega's 'Encancaranublado' in its emphasis on the lack of solidarity among Antilleans.

More so than in Condé's novel, many characters in Rojas are multiracial, multicultural and/or multilingual. Thus Clara is described as: 'Una negra colorada que bien podía pasar por mulata', displaying 'huellas del mestizaje hindú' (p. 36). She is bilingual in English and Spanish, and so are her children. Her son Andrés also speaks French and French Creole. The protagonists move between Jamaica, Cuba, London, Paris, Catalonia and New York, and those who are Cuban-born are actually of Jamaican or Haitian ancestry. Most of the ethnic groups that constitute the people of the Caribbean, including the Japanese, are represented in the novel. In fact the parable of the extraordinarily prolific union of the Saint Domingue white Creole

Prudencio Cassamajour and his black slave Zizi, who had twenty children, could be read as a praise of miscegenation: it is in stark contrast with Prudencio's official marriage with one of his kind, who died in her fifth childbirth (pp. 103-104).

Cultural elements like music and dance, medicinal herbs, and the various Afro-Antillean cults, notably in Haiti, Jamaica and Cuba, provide further links within the region. Thus Clara's daughter Anania, a particularly gifted dancer, develops a passion for the *Tumba francesa* and *La Carabalí*. The first is described as a dance 'al estilo de las culturas africanas del Congo y del Dajomé, imbricadas con la cultura francesa, versallesca' (p. 121), while it is said of *La Carabalí*: 'había en ella una simbiosis de transculturación, semejante a la Tumba francesa, aquella franco-africana y esta Carabalí hispano-africana o afro-española' (p. 138). Here the text explicitly refers to Fernando Ortiz's concept of *transculturación* (or creolisation), and subsequently it mentions the essay by Nancy Morejón discussed in the introduction. The comparison between the two dances further suggest that, together with José Luis González in 'El país de cuatro pisos', Rojas argues that while the European cultural element is divisive – as evidenced in the linguistic barrier on the ship – the African legacy is the cement that binds Caribbean cultures together.

Rojas further implies that Cuba owes not only her cultural wealth, but also her economic prosperity to immigrants: while the Afro-Caribbean immigrants' labour has largely sustained the economic growth of the Cuban sugar industry, previous immigration waves have equally participated in this prosperity. Thus the Saint Domingue colonists who fled the French Revolution and the abolition of slavery brought to Cuba the technical expertise necessary to agricultural modernisation:

Prudencio desembarcó en la mayor de las Antillas con poca fortuna en oro, pero con un guacal lleno de técnicas modernas de agricultura, minería y comercio; sabía medir las tierras muy bien y detectaba como ningún otro colono la acidez de los suelos, sabiendo enseguida por esa fórmula cuál era el más conveniente para el café o la caña, o cual había que mejorarlo con cal. (p. 104).

So immigration and miscegenation are seen as enriching, in every sense of the term: 'mezclaron [...] su sangre, sus intereses económicos y sus costumbres con las de los criollos blancos, los criollos negros, los esclavos y los pardos' (p. 109). Significantly, Rojas points out that Cubans themselves have in the past emigrated. The nationalists José Martí, the Maceos' mother Mariana Grajales and Ernesto Bavastro Cassard all sought political asylum in Jamaica. Without the support of the



Jamaican government and population, the author implies, perhaps the Cubans would not have achieved independence: 'recordaban en Jamaica [al] músico Ernesto Bavastro Cassard, quien con su flauta de plata ofrecía conciertos y animaba fiestas para recaudar dinero con que contribuir a la Guerra de independencia de Cuba' (p. 37). Therefore, not only did intra-regional migration benefit Cuba culturally and economically, it played a crucial role in its political development too.

Rojas's novel therefore makes a strong case for pan-Caribbeanism and Creolisation. Her protagonist Clara is shown to play a central role in these processes, not only through her ethnic make up and her life as a Jamaican immigrant in Cuba, but also through the education she received and the one she intends to give her children and their friends. Thus she tells stories of her ancestors who emigrated to Mosquito and then to Panama: 'A Clara Spencer le sobraban facultades histriónicas para representar en el relato todo cuanto les habían contado sus predecesores, *griots* antillanos, y [...] deleitaba a sus interlocutors con esos minuciosos testimonios trasladados hasta ella por la memoria oral de generación en generación. Sus reseñas podían considerarse clases de historia de la América desconocida' (p. 34). She uses the same material in her English classes: 'Así eran los relatos de Clara Spencer, así también sus clases de inglés en las que casi nunca utilizaba libros tradicionales, sino dictaba sus memorias orales' (pp. 35-36). Clara therefore clearly holds a pan-Caribbean conception of the region, and she tries to pass this belief on to her children and pupils. She is thus shown to play a crucial role in the transmission of unofficial accounts of regional history, and portrayed as an enthusiastic promoter of the pan-Caribbean ideal. Yet her position is not depicted as specific to women, since her sons Robert and Andrés, together with her daughter Anania, are also active advocates of pan-Caribbeanism and the syncretic cultures of the Americas.

In *Throvia de la Dominique*, Sylviane Telchid likewise openly advocates intra-regional immigration. The economic privileges ensured by their neo-colonial status have made the DOMs (just like Puerto Rico in the Greater Antilles) a particularly attractive destination for some Caribbean nationals, on account of a shared history and language. Guadeloupe is thus particularly attractive to Haitians as well as (Anglophone) Dominicans, while St Lucians prefer to settle in neighbouring Martinique. Yet the economic affluence of the DOMs is revealed to be a sham in Telchid's text: 'Il y avait une telle apparence de luxe sur cette terre qui l'avait

accueillie! [...] Elle ne savait pas, Silma, que dans ces régions tout n'était qu'apparence, faire-voir, belle barrique mauvaise-morue' (*Throvia de la Dominique*, p. 14). The actual economic situation of the French Caribbean (with an unemployment rate of about 30 percent) explains the discontent of Guadeloupeans towards illegal immigrants, who provide competing cheap labour:

Depuis quelques temps, [on annonçait que] le nombre d'émigrés clandestins ne cessait de croître. Venus d'Haïti dont ils fuyaient la violence et la misère, ou de la Dominique, ils abordaient par toutes les côtes accessibles du pays [...]. Les ouvriers [g]uadeloupéens protestaient parce qu'ils cassaient les prix de la main d'oeuvre. Des contrôles policiers s'effectuaient [...]. Quelle tragédie pour ceux [qu'on avait attrapés et qu'on avait voltigés dans le car de police,] que le besoin avait chassés de chez eux!' (pp. 46-47).

This economic reality largely accounts for the growing xenophobia among Guadeloupeans. Thus, while Haitians are reputed to be honest and hard working, Dominicans are frequently deemed to be associated with crime (especially drugs). This last aspect is clearly illustrated in the novel:

Des actes de violence répétés avaient été perpétrés par des ressortissants Dominicains, disait la rumeur publique. Des Guadeloupéens, excédés, avaient donc décidé de rendre leur propre justice. [...] ils se sont tournés vers ces pacotilleuses [...] Toutes y passèrent sans distinction de nationalité, Dominicaines, Haïtiennes, ces moun-déwo d'où venait tout le mal! (p. 70)

The novel denounces the bias of such opinions when it discloses that the criminals that led to those misguided reprisals were in fact Guadeloupeans passing for Dominicans: 'Eh oui! des Guadeloupéens bon teint. Un zeste d'accent dominicain, un bonnet de rasta [...], l'allure swinguante du Dominicain, voilà notre Guadeloupéen ressemblant comme un vrai jumeau à son frère caribéen de la Dominique' (p. 71). This last sentence implies that, regardless of nationality, Guadeloupeans and Dominicans are brothers, and should therefore show solidarity.

The similarities between Dominican and Guadeloupean cultures are indeed underlined throughout the novel, but nowhere as openly as in the following extract: '[Throvia] revit ce passage fulgurant où [...] elle avait cru revivre le passé de ces ancêtres. [...] Cette terre est née du sang, de la sueur des miens. J'y ai aussi mes droits, car je suis sœur de tous les Guadeloupéens' (p. 46). Although the issue is not explicitly brought up in the text, the immigration laws towards Caribbean nationals are to be read against those applying to European Union nationals, who can enter freely the French territories. In such a context, the text seems to imply, Caribbean

nationals, especially those from the neighbouring islands or those, like the Haitians, who share a same colonial past, should be entitled to similar rights.

As in Rojas, the solidarity between islands is shown to work both ways. In the past Guadeloupeans have benefitted from their Anglophone neighbours' help:

quand le Général de Gaulle, de l'Angleterre, a lancé son appel pour rejoindre les Forces Françaises Libres, une pile de Guadeloupéens sont partis à la Dissidence. Et qui les a accueillis? qui les a aidés à traverser l'Atlantique? Eh ben, c'est nous, nous les Dominicains [...] C'est depuis ça [...] que les Guadeloupéens et les Dominicains sont devenus frères. Oui frères! Parce que nous sortons du même boudin, celui de notre manman l'Afrique. Mais c'est aussi parce que nous avons vu de la misère ensemble. Après la guerre, ce ne sont pas deux Dominicains qui sont venus vivre ici! [...] Les Guadeloupéens reconnaissants ont ouvert grands leurs bras à leurs frères de la Dominique (p. 20)

A marked difference with the Cuban text, however, is that in Telchid women are clearly singled out as the advocates of pan-Caribbeanism and creolisation. The previous chapter has shown the centrality of Pétrolina and Throvia in the transmission of a Creole culture through storytelling and proverbial wisdom, as well as their role in the elaboration of a Creole voice. The same pattern is found in the family of Throvia's friend Mirella Cossolongo, whose great-grandmother arrived in Guadeloupe after the slave emancipation: 'Cette femme énergique et autoritaire eut toute sa vie deux grandes préoccupations: garder intactes les coutumes rapportées de son Congo natal et assurer la perennité du nom Moussolongo' (p. 32). Eloah Moussolongo's fierce decision to maintain her cultural traditions are not exclusive of a creolisation process: on the contrary, she becomes an agent of it by choosing a Guadeloupean as a companion. Thus the Grappe-à-Congo, a ceremony that allows the living to contact their dead, is creolised: when Throvia attends it (in the quote p. 46 given above) she claims this tradition as not only one of hers, but of all Guadeloupeans. Once again, it is the women of the family who appear to be the most active in keeping the Congolese customs alive. These are passed on from mother to daughter, so that four generations down Mirella still follows them. Other women in the text are presented as agents of the creolisation process, in particular Magdala's Syrian grandmother and an old Indo-Caribbean neighbour.

So as in Condé, Rojas, and the theoreticians discussed in the introduction, pan-Caribbeanism is accompanied by a praise of multiculturalism and Creolisation. The previous chapter has discussed the hybridity of the style of *Throvia*. This is coupled with a positive evaluation of cultural and ethnic *métissage* in the text. Thus Throvia's physical appearance is described in these terms: 'elle tenait à la fois de

son père et de sa mère: le teint assez foncé, les cheveux crépus, contrastaient avec les pommettes hautes, les yeux étirés, le front plat. Tout le monde s'étonnait de ses traits de jaune sur son visage noir' (p. 26). Although she is nicknamed 'la chinoise noire', Throvia's oriental features are imputable to her Carib mother. In addition to her friend of Congolese descent Mirella, Throvia's best friend Magdala is Lebano-Antillean. Furthermore, Throvia's boyfriend is Indo-Caribbean. So that by the end of the book, Throvia's *métissage* has increased. It is no longer simply ethnic, but cultural too. The protagonist, who lives with Magdala's family, is now called 'la Syrienne noire'. Multiculturalism is truly celebrated at Magdala's party:

Il y avait là un bon paquet de Syriens. Mais il y avait là aussi toute sorte de personnes-Guadeloupe. Depuis le nègre gros-sirop, jusqu'au blanc bonbon-moussache, avec toutes ces variantes que sont les nègres fourmis-rouges, les nègres peaux-chappées, les nègres à cheveux couédés, les chabins à z'yeux gris, les Indiens. Et les bata! bata z'indiens, bata-blancs, bata-syriens.

Accents et intonations se mélangeaient: rouler des blancs-France, tonalités gutturales des arabes, modulations créoles, inflexions chantantes, nasillardes, juvéniles... (p. 98).

As in Rojas, Telchid's book has a didactic tone and preaches a greater acceptance of racial and cultural differences, seen as the only way forward for Caribbean societies, as well as the necessary condition for the unity of the region.

If, therefore, the basis of Glissant's *antillanité* is rather intellectual and theoretical, in Rojas and Telchid it is more practical and down-to-earth, relying on emigration and economic survival. These authors' pan-Caribbean approach can be seen as more realistic than that of Glissant: like Vega, Rojas and Telchid insist on the rivalries that exist to this day between Antilleans, and denounce them as vestiges of colonialism. Pan-Caribbeanism implies new solidarities, which require an eradication of the barriers established by the various colonial powers. Although the various pan-African movements did work to bring the diverse culture of the Caribbean across languages (as happened between Guillén, Roumain, and Langston Hughes, or between Carpentier and Depestre), it is nonetheless significant that among *négritude* advocates, for instance, the unity of the Francophone world should have overridden that of the region.

Women seem particularly attracted to the notions of pan-Caribbeanism and *mestizaje* or *métissage* as identity discourses. This is perhaps hardly surprising, given that, as demonstrated in chapter two, many reject the conception of a history construed as a search for pure origins, as the beginning of an atavistic culture.

Chapter three showed how a practice of linguistic hybridity could be interpreted as an *anti-machista* move, for sexist, canonical discourses have invariably defined the national identity as a static concept to be kept pure of any contamination with other cultures. The first section of this chapter has examined how some Caribbean women writers challenge pan-Africanist theories because these favour a unique origin (Africa) and therefore do not value *mestizaje* or *métissage*. While the previous section on Fanon has demonstrated the pernicious effects that a rejection of pan-Africanism can take when mistaken for a rejection of one's Africanness (through alienation and a lactification complex), this section has discussed the benefits that women see in a discourse that does not understand national identity as atavistic and static, but as one enriched by the interaction with other cultures, notably through immigration. For some, as discussed further in the next chapter in relation to Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *Matildana*, the acceptance of one's cultural and ethnic hybridity is in fact the way out of the logic of alienation described by Fanon. If intra-regional migrations have contributed to the wealth of the Caribbean, the next chapter discusses how extra-regional emigration has compelled many writers (from within or outside of the archipelago), to re-examine the notion of Caribbeanness.

## 5

**Re-envisaging Caribbeanness:  
Diaspora Women Writers and Exile**

Emigration and exile are phenomena that are almost intrinsic to Caribbean societies, touching, in some way or another, each and every family. Manuel Hernández comments: 'According to the 1990 United States Census, about 44 percent of all people of Puerto Rican origin live in the United States. In other words, there are almost as many Puerto Ricans in the US as on the island.'<sup>1</sup> This holds true for Guadeloupeans and Martiniquans in relation to France. The proportion of Cubans, Dominicans and Haitians residing outside of their respective countries is likewise very high. Thus, for instance, the hard currency sent yearly by Dominican emigrants to their island relatives, adding up to over US \$1800 million, constitutes the foremost income of the Dominican economy (almost 50 percent).<sup>2</sup> Given the extent of the phenomenon, emigration and exile have no doubt been fundamental in the shaping of Caribbean ideologies, arts and literature. They also have a continuing impact on the region's economic and political development.

Due to the island's bond with the United States, Puerto Rican emigration is more intense than for the other two Hispanic Antilles. Today, it is also often different in

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<sup>1</sup> In 'The Unexplored Reality: Puerto Rican Literature Written in the United States', unpublished article delivered at the Caribe 2000 Symposium in 1996, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, p. 1. Abstract in *Rethinking English in Puerto Rico*, ed. by Lowell Fiet, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>2</sup> Juan B. Castillo (Tita), 'La emigración dominicana: causas y consecuencias', *Antilla News* 45 (Barcelona, Summer 2001), pp. 10-11.

kind: the number of Puerto Ricans who switch back and forth between the island and the mainland (a phenomenon Luis Rafael Sánchez calls 'guagua aérea') is considerable. Thus the ties are never completely severed, quite unlike the Cuban or Haitian diaspora. This kind of emigration is increasingly found among the Dominicans too, especially those residing in Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, this 'flying bus' or 'air bus' phenomenon is relatively recent. Indeed, as attested by early Puerto Rican literature in English, most of the Puerto Ricans emigrants of the 1950s and 1960s simply could not afford to visit the island, let alone return for good. The French Antillean (as against Haitian) emigration to the metropole is in this respect similar to the Puerto Rican one. The ease with which Puerto Ricans and French Antilleans can settle in their respective metropole distinguishes the writing of these two communities from others in the Caribbean. Added to this is the high mobility of Caribbean writers, who in the past decade or two have become extremely attractive to US academic circles. Symptomatic 'air bus' migrants (who are no longer real *emigrants*) are Luis Rafael Sánchez himself, Maryse Condé, Édouard Glissant, or Derek Walcott, to cite a few, who all commute between their island of origin and the United States.

The terms 'exile' and 'diaspora' are commonly restricted to cases of enforced individual or collective emigration, usually for fear of political persecution. In this specific acceptation, in the context of the twentieth-century Caribbean, the term 'exile' would only apply to political emigrants, mainly intellectuals, from Haiti (throughout the century, notably during Duvalierism), the Dominican Republic (particularly under Trujillo, but also more recently under Balaguer), Cuba (under Machado, Batista, and at various points in revolutionary Cuba, particularly in the early 1960s and the years following the Mariel exodus in 1980), as well as Puerto Rican pro-independence activists between the 1950s and 1970s (such as José Luis González, forced into a twenty-year exile from 1953 because of his marxist inclinations). According to such a definition, therefore, those leaving their country for economic or other reasons should be designated as 'emigrants', and not exiles.

Yet such a distinction is problematic. Firstly, because the borderline between economic and political emigration is often tenuous, since economic hardship usually increases for the poor under oppressive regimes, as has occurred in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Secondly, because for many people the economic motives for emigration can be just as pressing as political ones, a matter of survival: witness the

desperation of the boat people, largely Haitians and Dominicans, but also – increasingly so since the beginning of the Special Period in the early 1990s – Cubans. In such cases, economic emigration is virtually enforced. But certainly the main objection to such a distinction between economic and political emigration is that, ever since the 1960s, this has supported the application of a discriminatory US immigration policy towards Caribbean nationals. This is nowhere as evident as in the different categorisation of Cubans and Haitians. As a result of the Cold War, the former have generally been granted political asylum even in the many cases where the motives for emigration were in fact more economic than ideological. The almost systematic classification of the Haitians as economic emigrants, on the other hand, has meant that the hopes of many of those seeking refuge from political tyranny as well as poverty have been frustrated.<sup>3</sup>

There is also a semantic argument in support of a different interpretation of the term 'exile'. Unlike the word emigration, 'exile' acquires a specific psychological dimension, denoting a certain nostalgia for the homeland, heightened by the impossibility of return. Since most political exiles are banned from their country and many never see it again, the common association of exile and nostalgia is not surprising. By contrast, many economic emigrants (especially from the Commonwealth and French Caribbean, Puerto Rico and, increasingly so, the Dominican Republic) work towards retirement in their native island. Yet, as political exiles, Haitians and Cubans cannot have such aspirations, because the instability or predicament of their country impedes a permanent return; for the latter, it was even impossible to visit the island until very recently.<sup>4</sup> All these motives justify the extension of the terms exile and diaspora to all cases of *enforced* emigration, whether on political, economic, or social grounds. Most of the writers under discussion here either left in person for political reasons, or, as is more usually the

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<sup>3</sup> Haitians are virtually all black or mulattoes. 98% of Miami Cubans, however, qualify as 'white'. Figures from Christopher P. Baker, *Cuba Handbook* (1<sup>st</sup> edition), Chico (CA): Moon Publications Inc., 1997, p. 90, quoted in E. George, 'The Cuban Intervention in Angola', *op. cit.*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>4</sup> Even today, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Cold War remains very present in the Caribbean. It is patent in the relationship between Cuba and Puerto Rico: for instance, there is no air transport between the two (when one can fly to Cuba straight from Miami). Likewise, in the mid-1990s, the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico – that is, its highest authority, appointed by the governor and legislature, then both controlled by the statehood party – sought to limit cultural exchanges and academic visits to Cuba by publishing the names of all those who in the past few years had received university funds for such purposes.



case, simply followed their parents, who in turn often had political motives to leave the island: so these authors can be said to be enforced emigrants.

### **Exile writing and the Caribbean literary corpus**

In a Caribbean context, the notion of exile generally evokes the forced departures of Cuban, Dominican and Haitian intellectuals, who have invariably been subject to the persecution of successive dictatorial regimes. Yet even liberal Caribbean democracies remain limiting to many regional *litterati*. Lamming asserts that the predicament of local writers – especially in the French and Anglophone Caribbean, much smaller societies than the Hispanic area and Haiti – is such that for many, only a ‘chosen exile’ can remove the constraints hampering their literary activity. Lamming refers to the generation of writers who left for London between 1948 and 1958, mostly because they felt that they could never achieve recognition at home, where they ‘suffered active discouragement of [their] own community’ (*The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 41). So for Lamming, even when, to all appearances, they make their own decision to leave, writers actually feel forced to do so: they would rather function in their own society. This is why, even when their exile is ‘chosen’, they continue to yearn for the island. Likewise, French Caribbean writers have frequently found the homeland stifling: Joseph Zobel, Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin and Myriam Warner-Vieyra are largely based ‘abroad’, which has effectively become their new home. In fact, because of the very late development of higher education in the region, most of the major Anglophone and Francophone authors have spent at least their formative years abroad, usually in metropolitan institutions.

Of course, the situation has changed considerably since 1960, and several members of subsequent generations of writers have not found their society so stifling and preferred to remain at home: the Trinidadian Earl Lovelace, the Haitians Frankétienne and Yanick Lahens, or the French Caribbean *créolistes* such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Ernest Pépin and Gisèle Pineau, are cases in point. Most of all, many have pointed out the inconsistency of postcolonial writers seeking exile at the heart of the metropole (no longer simply Paris or London, but increasingly North American cities). After all, the metropole is ‘the locus of those patriarchal, heterosexist, middle-class norms that dominate life in the colony and at

the colonizing center'.<sup>5</sup> Already in the 1950s, Lamming was acutely aware of this incongruity; it was the need to 'get out' rather than an attraction to the place, he argues, that drove writers to London. Yet at the same time he explains that Britain had for Caribbean intellectuals an aura that the United States did not. Today, however, writers like Vic Reid, Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé, or Édouard Glissant have preferred North America to their own (former) colonial metropole as a more appropriate destination of exile.

In Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the reasons for the writers' discontent are not so much social as ideological: successive dictatorial regimes in these countries have invariably persecuted writers. Raymond D. Souza notes that 'the experience of exile has been an all too common occurrence in the history of Cuban literature'.<sup>6</sup> This comment could be extended to Haitian and Dominican writing. Souza cites the case of Cuban nineteenth-century poet José María Heredia to emphasise that exile writing has often had a significant influence on political and social events in the homeland. 'In the twentieth century, prior to the Revolution of 1959', Souza adds, 'writers at times found it more convenient to live abroad than to face uncertain political situations' (p. 1). He then gives the example of Alejo Carpentier, whose 'self-imposed exile' in 1928 was motivated by his forty-day imprisonment in 1927. He adds: 'The number of writers in exile, whether voluntarily embraced or not, has served as a barometer of political conditions throughout Cuba's history, and this is as true today as it was before the Revolution of 1959' (p. 1). Again similar observations would relate to Haiti or the Dominican Republic.

Many women writers from the more liberal Caribbean still find their societies stifling because in addition to the difficulties experienced by their male counterparts they must face gender prejudice. In fact, the literary aspirations and careers of most of the early Caribbean women writers mentioned in the introduction, such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Adelaida Cartagena Portalatín, Mayotte Capécia, and Jean Rhys, to cite a few, have been enhanced or even only made possible by

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<sup>5</sup> Angela Ingram, 'Introduction: On the Contrary, Outside of It', p. 7, in *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989, pp. 1-15.

<sup>6</sup> 'Exile in the Cuban Literary Experience', p. 1, in *Cuban Exile Writers*, ed. by Daniel C. Maratos and Mamesba C. Hill, Metuchen (NJ) and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1986, pp. 1-5.

exile (taken in its broad acceptation).<sup>7</sup> Others like Julia de Burgos, Marie Chauvet or Nadine Magloire went into exile – self-imposed or encouraged by their family – to escape from the pressures generated by their literary activity. Thus, as Ingram notes in her introduction: ‘exile is often more a *getting away from* than *going to* a place. This is probably true [for most exiles]; it is particularly true for women whose home environments, once we actually look at them, are never quite “home” ’ (p. 4, italics in the original). Among younger Caribbean women writers, Jamaica Kincaid is perhaps the most vociferous in denouncing this situation. Similarly, in her story ‘Women Like Us’, Danticat indicates that today women writers still arouse disapproval in Haiti:

Writing [...] was an act of indolence, something to be done in a corner when you could have been learning to cook. [...] No, women like you don’t write. They carve onion sculptures and potato statues. They sit down in dark corners and braid their hair in new shapes and twists in order to control the stiffness, the unruliness, the rebelliousness. [...] You remember [your mother’s] silence when you laid your first notebook in front of her. Her disappointment when you told her that words would be your life’s work, like the kitchen had always been hers. She was angry at you for not understanding. [...] Writers don’t leave any mark in the world. Not the world where we are from. In our world, writers are tortured and killed if they are men. Called lying whores, then raped and killed, if they are women (*Krik? Krak!*, pp. 219-221).

So, until recently at least, women writers have usually gained more from exile than they have lost. In fact, it would be fair to ask if a female Caribbean literary voice would have emerged at all, were it not for exile (whether temporary or permanent). This points to the fact that, besides representing a large proportion of the literary production of the region as a whole, diaspora writing plays an increasingly significant role in the shaping of the area, culturally or otherwise. This justifies its inclusion in the Caribbean literary corpus. For Haitian critic Jean Jonassaint, the phenomenon of exile and diaspora writing now calls for a cultural redefinition, a claim that can be extended to the rest of the Caribbean.<sup>8</sup> Jonassaint is echoed by Condé: ‘Je veux parler d’une redéfinition de la “littérature antillaise”. [...] Je me demande si [aujourd’hui] les vieilles catégories de race, nationalité, territoire auxquelles nous nous accrochons ne sont pas en train de devenir caduques’ (*Penser la créolité*, p. 305). Michael Dash likewise notes that Depestre understands exile as

<sup>7</sup> On Capécia, see Christiane Makward in *Mayotte Capécia ou l’aliénation selon Fanon*.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Jonassaint, ‘Haitian Writers in Exile: A Survey of North America’, *Caribbean Quarterly* 27: 4 (Mona, Jamaica, December 1981), pp. 13-20.

'an almost inevitable process of ceaseless transformation'.<sup>9</sup> It is to reflect this reality that the final chapter of this study centres on diasporic Caribbean literature. As argued by José Luis González in 'El escritor en el exilio', diaspora and local writing are two complementary visions of a same reality, and as such both equally crucial to the understanding of the complexities of the Caribbean.

### **'Language shift': Haitian and Hispanic Caribbean writing in English**

Bilingualism is common to many emigration stories. In the case of an exile writer this phenomenon, which could be called 'language switch' (what the Russian-American poet Joseph Brodsky terms 'the byproduct of exile'), acquires particular significance.<sup>10</sup> Since exile writers frequently draw inspiration from the native land and culture, their resort to a different language can seem paradoxical. The linguistic predicament of Caribbean writers, especially in bilingual or diglossic societies, was discussed in chapter three. Cuban, Haitian, Dominican, or Puerto Rican writers residing in the United States (such as Cristina García, Edwidge Danticat, Julia Álvarez, Maritza Lozada Pérez, and Esmeralda Santiago, among many others), or elsewhere (for example, the Haitian Micheline Dusseck in Spain and the Puerto Rican Alba Nydia Ambert in Britain) face a similar dilemma to that of island-based writers in Puerto Rico or the Francophone Caribbean.

Obviously, linguistic competence is often the decisive factor in an author's choice. Thus writers born or mostly raised in emigration (such as García, Álvarez, Danticat or Santiago) usually opt for their 'adoptive' rather than 'native' tongue.<sup>11</sup> Those who emigrate at a later stage, such as Dusseck, then, are the ones really facing a dilemma. In that case, commercial interests are often a consideration. For instance, the breach Afro-American literature has opened in the US book market over the past few decades has generated a growing demand for 'ethnic minority' writing, especially by women. As discussed previously, this incited Rosario Ferré to write in English.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Brodsky, 'The Condition We Call Exile', *New York Review of Books*, 21 January 1988, pp. 16-20, quoted in *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. by Angela Ingram and Mary Lynn Broe, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Here the quotation marks signal that the *adopted* tongue is often more natural to these authors than the so-called *native* one, perhaps more accurately designated as the *mother's tongue*.

<sup>12</sup> Ideology may be another factor. Thus Micheline Dusseck informed critic Marie-Dominique Le Rumeur that she was motivated to publish her first novel *Ecos del Caribe* (Barcelona: Femenino

So in all the instances given above, the writers have chosen to write in the 'adopted' tongue. This choice could further point to the fact that, had they remained on their native island, several would not have been able or allowed to write. So, as writers, they were truly born in exile. Their 'adopted' tongue, however, is not conventional, but often permeated by the 'native' one. The author thus creates her own language, in a very similar fashion to the Caribbean writer in a bilingual or diglossic context discussed in chapter three. Language shift can have major consequences: while on the one hand it opens the US, Spanish, or other markets to these authors, it can on the other hand exclude them from their homeland market, as many Caribbean critics tend to consider as foreign those writers who publish in a different language. Therefore, as Lamming and Jonassaint note in their essays, diaspora writing raises the question of readership. Against the opinion of certain critics who consider that 'language shift' is a loss to Caribbean writing, it could be argued that this phenomenon is on the contrary salutary. For authors like Álvarez and Danticat have achieved what many writers from the non-Commonwealth Caribbean previously could not: an audience in the United States and subsequently worldwide, until then a prerogative of their Anglophone neighbours. And it is through their work that Caribbean writing is now becoming known around the world, via the United States. Furthermore, by encouraging comparative criticism, the work of these authors helps to eradicate the old but persistent colonial fragmentation of the Caribbean that has so far invariably resulted in literary insularism.

### **The representation of the Caribbean in diaspora writing**

'The experience of exile, particularly told from a personal viewpoint, is frequently avoided by many writers', Souza notes ('Exile in the Cuban Literary Experience', p. 2). Symptomatic of this attitude is the fiction of Cuban-Puerto Rican

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Lumen, 1996) in Spanish – a language she acquired in adulthood – by the greater prospect of attracting a Spanish, rather than Haitian audience, since she resides in Spain. Such an explanation does not seem quite satisfactory, however: writing in French (a tongue probably more natural to the author than Creole, given her middle-class background) would have constituted a decisive advantage, because of the existing niche for Haitian literature on the Francophone market. This suggests that Dusseck's choice of Spanish is likely to be grounded in ideological factors. This third tongue could have provided a convenient alternative to the linguistic dilemma that faces Haitian writers, just as studying French enabled Ana Lydia Vega to evade the polemic around language in Puerto Rico. The outcome is that Dusseck's work is carving a space for Haitian writing in the Hispanic literary market.

Mayra Montero: it only recently began to make allusion to Cuba, which the author left at around fifteen, or to the experience of adapting to Puerto Rico. This is all the more striking, in that her writing is concerned instead with Haiti (where the author has never lived), or with an insider's view of Puerto Rico. For Souza, Cuban writers often shun the experience of exile in their work, either because they are reluctant to dwell on a painful past, or because they wish to avoid politicisation. Indeed, as he comments: 'The vilification of the Castro regime has certainly marred the work of many Cuban exiles. In many of these writings, political intent overwhelms technique, and some are merely emotional diatribes' (p. 3).<sup>13</sup>

This tendency to block out the present (exile and its harsh realities of uprooting and adjustment) is also displayed in non-political writers from the Caribbean diaspora. From a distance, many of them (often male) have in the past recreated their island as a lost paradise. This is particularly evident in the numerous novels of childhood produced by Caribbean writers, in which the homeland is idealised through a more or less naive gaze combined with selective memory. In an interview with Carmen Dolores Hernández, Abraham Rodríguez, Jr. denounces the Puerto Rican diaspora writers who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, notably Piri Thomas, for 'not saying anything interesting [...], especially to young people growing up now [in the 1990s]. What they're saying is forty years old. [...] They seem stuck in another era' (*Puerto Rican Voices in English*, p. 140). He adds further:

They had nothing to offer me because I didn't see anything I could really relate to inside of them. In terms of the voice, in terms of the language, in terms of the subject matter, nothing. It's like writing about the island. It's a myth to me. The island is a myth. [...] It doesn't exist for me at all (*Puerto Rican Voices in English*, p. 141).

Rodríguez attacks these authors on the grounds that their nostalgic gaze on the past and the island did not relate to the reality of the second-generation Puerto Rican diaspora. Though not unfounded, Rodríguez's statement requires modulation, for there were exceptions: such a claim cannot be sustained with Nicholasa Mohr, for instance. Yet it is true that a strong tendency to idealise the homeland is found among early diaspora writers across the region. If Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) avoids escapism to dwell instead on the harsh realities of exile,

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<sup>13</sup> Among the younger Cuban women writers in exile, some of the later novels by Dáina Chaviano (*El hombre, la hembra, y el hambre*, Barcelona: Planeta, 1998) and Zoe Valdés (*La nada cotidiana*, Barcelona: Emecé editores, 1996, 1<sup>st</sup> edition Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1994) illustrate this point.

many of his precursors and contemporaries initially preferred to block out this experience. Cases in point are Claude McKay in *Renaissance Harlem*, and the early writing of many of the novelists who emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, notably George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Roger Mais, and Michael Anthony. Even when they are well aware of their island's limitations, which drove them to 'get out', few of these authors have been capable of looking back at the homeland without idealising it. Conscious of this paradox, Lamming comments: 'This may be the dilemma of the West Indian writer abroad: that he hungers for nourishment from a soil which he (as ordinary citizen) could not at present endure' (*The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 50). Thus the very critical stance of V.S. Naipaul constitutes an exception. Naipaul, however, goes overboard: the Trinidad that emerges from his work (in *Miguel Street*, for instance) is distorted by his cynicism and disenchantment with the island. This attitude turns out to be just as counterproductive as that of idealisation. George Lamming comments on Naipaul in his essay: 'His books can't move beyond a castrated satire; [in the case of] a colonial, ashamed of his cultural background [...], satire, like the charge of philistinism, is for me no more than a refuge' (p. 225).

The founders of the literary tradition of the French Caribbean (who all at some point resided outside their island) have likewise frequently indulged in the depiction of an idyllic homeland in order to escape from the reality of exile. The Martinique of Joseph Zobel's *La Rue cases-nègres* and Édouard Glissant's first novel *La Lézarde*, for instance, both have a ring of *Paradise Lost*, even though Dash comments on the latter that the author is keenly aware of the impossibility of return to this paradise.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, although it exposes the shortcomings of peasant society, Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, published after the author had spent several years abroad, cannot resist romanticising rural Haiti. Among the exceptions, however, is Césaire, who in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* both depicts a sordid Martinique and relates the experience of exile, notably in the memorable passage of the black man on the tramway. Younger male writers depart sensibly from this pattern, as attested by Daniel Maximin's and Dany Lafférière's fiction. Yet, because it revolves almost exclusively around the Paris-based Antillean intellectuals in the

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<sup>14</sup> 'For Glissant, not only is return impossible but man must turn his back on paradise' ('Exile and Recent Literature', p. 454, in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean vol. 1*, ed. by Arnold, *op. cit.*, pp. 451-461).

years preceding World War II, Maximin's account of Siméa's exile in *L'Isolé soleil* is not as graphic as Césaire's depiction of the experience.

The impulse to idealisation of the Caribbean in the literature produced abroad is almost inevitable: it is a consequence of the authors' displacement. In fact, with the possible exception of Cuban diaspora writers, later generations have been less inclined to this tendency, as well as more concerned with the experience of exile itself. The writings of the Puerto Ricans Ed Vega, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Esmeralda Santiago, the St Kittian Caryl Phillips, or the first novel by Haitian Dany Laferrière attest to this.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above in relation to Nicholasa Mohr, early women diaspora writers have often offered a much more sober picture of the Caribbean in their work than their male counterparts. US-born Barbadian Paule Marshall, who published her first novel in 1959, is an example. Among the younger generation, the vision of the Caribbean is also less idyllic in Jamaica Kincaid, for instance. Thus, while clearly expressing a longing for the island, her fiction, from the very first book *At the Bottom of the River* in 1983, denounces the socialisation of women in colonial Antigua. Her 1985 childhood novel *Annie John* closes with the departure of the sixteen-year old protagonist, leaving her native island, like her mother before her, simply out of the necessity of 'getting out'. As for Kincaid's third work of fiction, *Lucy* (1990), it centres on the hard process of redefinition and adjustment required by exile. This novel resists any idealisation of the island.<sup>15</sup>

A similar gender difference is found across the region. In the French Caribbean, while Myriam Warner-Vieyra's protagonists Zétou and Juletane both recreate a paradisiacal Guadeloupe in *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit...* and *Juletane*, in the first that vision is tempered by the fact that the protagonist left her adored island without hesitation, which suggests that it is her breakdown that prompts her to idealise her island; in the latter novel, Juletane's mythical fantasy is undermined in the narrative centring on Hélène. The image of Guadeloupe that emerges from Condé's *La Vie scélérate* is likewise hardly flattering: here again the female protagonist feels stifled by family and social pressures, which lead her to leave the homeland.

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<sup>15</sup> All three works published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York; republished in UK by Plume books, and Jonathan Cape for *Lucy*. Kincaid receives very mixed appraisal in the Caribbean for her extremely critical stance. *Lucy* likewise stresses that what the protagonist needs most is to free herself from her sexist upbringing. See Odile Ferly, 'At Home and Abroad', *op. cit.*



The reasons for such contrasting visions of the island and emigration in male and women's diaspora writing may well be sought in the sexism of Caribbean societies and the difference that gender makes to exile. Belinda Edmondson argues in her doctoral thesis that diaspora women writers describe themselves as 'immigrants', as against their male counterparts, who regard themselves as 'exiles'. Although her terminology is debatable, Edmondson has a point here in emphasising that diaspora women usually entertain a more positive relation to their adoptive land than men. Despite the sense of dislocation brought about by exile, it is true that for women the experience hardly ever turns out to be entirely negative. Indeed, the societies to which they emigrate are often less sexist than those they come from. For many, the very conditions of exile, the anguish and at the same time the freedom provided by not quite fitting into a new society, remove some of the social pressures found at home.

### **Exile in diaspora women writers from the Hispanic and Francophone areas**

Many diaspora women writers reproduce their exile in fiction. Nicholasa Mohr was the first Puerto Rican to do so with *Nilda* (1973). The novel focuses on the hardships of exile (notably poverty, crime and discrimination), and refers very little to the original homeland. In this respect, although the author is not of Caribbean origin but *chicana*, Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) could be more appropriately regarded as a precursor to the texts examined below. In fact, its filiation with one of them, *Dreaming in Cuban*, is acknowledged in a chapter entitled 'The House on Palmas Street'. Cisneros's novel deals with a Mexican family living in a Hispanic neighbourhood in the United States. The main protagonist, Esperanza, is torn between Mexico, which she hardly remembers, and Mango Street, where she feels she does not belong. As announced by the dedication 'A las mujeres', there is a particular concern in the text for the plight of women in Hispanic societies, which is shown to remain oppressive even in exile.

Dominican-American Julia Álvarez is one of the first among the younger generation of diaspora writers to have written on exile. Her work is representative of a new kind of diaspora writing, which centres on the notion of hyphenated identity, or the idea that exiles truly inhabit a space between two cultures. Indeed, although most members of the new generation of diaspora writers from the Caribbean grew

up at least partly outside their island, which has facilitated their integration to the adoptive country, the progress of the means of transport has meant the possibility of frequent visits to the island (the *guagua aérea* phenomenon), which has kept tight the bond with the native culture. The various chapters of Álvarez's 1991 *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* can be read as independent stories, and were in fact originally published as such between 1983 and 1989. This first novel deals with the adaptation of the Dominican, upper-class García de la Torre family to their new home in New York. Of the title characters, it is to the third daughter, the writer Yolanda (or Yo), that particular attention is devoted. This focus is even more apparent in the 1997 sequel to the novel, *¡Yo!*, whose title, punning on the Spanish pronoun for the first person singular and Yolanda's nickname, emphasises the character's role as the author's *alter ego*. As with the 1991 novel, the chapters in *¡Yo!* can be read as independent stories.

*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* opens with the story 'Antojos', where middle-aged Yolanda, who has left her native Dominican Republic as a child, makes her first visit to the island in five years. A craving for guavas leads her to the remote countryside, where her car breaks down. Here the craving for guavas stands for Yolanda's nostalgia for the homeland. The story reveals the mechanisms at play in the idealisation process. Due to her prolonged absence and her determination to integrate into the Dominican Republic, Yolanda re-invents the island. She selects her positive recollections of the country (the guavas), dismissing the negative aspects, in particular the conditions of women in the upper class. Wishing to settle permanently in the island, Yolanda is prepared to renounce the more liberal upbringing she has received as a Dominican exile in the United States: 'She has sat back quietly, hoping she has learned, at last, to let the mighty wave of tradition roll on through her life and break on some other female shore' (p. 9). In this respect, her attitude contrasts with that of her mother Laura, who remembers very well her life back on the island, and who can therefore assess more accurately the extent to which exile can be liberating for Caribbean women. Another story relates Laura's complete transformation in the US: 'Laura had gotten used to the life here. She did not want to go back to the old country where, de la Torre or not, she was only a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she had never provided the required son). Better an independent nobody than a high-class houseslave' (pp. 143-144).

Despite Yolanda's intention to re-integrate to the island, the story progressively discloses the gap between the protagonist and Dominican society. Initially, the gap is cultural: Yolanda is quite different from her cousins, who stayed back in the Dominican Republic. Hence the aunts and cousins' reaction to Yolanda's crazy idea of going to the country on her own: 'This is not the States [...]. A woman just doesn't travel alone in this country. Especially these days' (p. 9). And Yolanda's suggestion of using public transport provokes general laughter: 'Can't you see it!? [...] Yoyo climbing into an old *camioneta* with all the *campesinos* and their fighting cocks and their goats and their pigs!' (p. 9). Thus Yolanda has forgotten the daily realities of the Dominican Republic: she clearly reasons as if she were in the United States.

In the second part of the story, the gap is not only cultural, but also social. In particular, there is a huge class difference between Yolanda and the villagers she meets. Everywhere she receives deferential treatment and encounters an attitude of submission. As the story progresses, the gap separating Yolanda from her fellow Dominicans increases. Alone on a country road with a flat tyre and night about to fall, Yolanda meets two local peasants. Petrified by fear, she remains speechless at first. Eventually, she finds an escape by pretending to be a US tourist. With this ironic ending, Álvarez indicates that the gulf cannot be bridged. Yolanda fails in her attempts to fit into the Dominican Republic because, although she is not unaware of some realities, she underestimates their significance: the Dominican Republic is divided by class, race and sex, to the extent that she feels she no longer belongs. None of the Dominicans she meets recognises her as one of theirs: the two peasants mistake her for a foreigner, and a guard does not believe that '[a] *dominicana* with a car [c]ould be out at this hour getting *guayabas*' (p. 22). Therefore, if on the one hand 'she believes she has never felt at home in the States, never' (p. 12), on the other hand Yolanda is no longer Dominican, which truly makes her an exile, between two homes, two cultures and two languages. The tension between two homes is reflected in the title and structure of the novel. Whereas the title seems to indicate a perfect integration of the García girls to the United States (they have lost their accents), the order of the stories, which go back in time instead of following the usual chronological progression, mirrors the attitude of the exiles looking back on their homeland and their past.

The tension between two languages manifests itself in Yolanda's constant hesitation between English and Spanish. In 'Antojos', her aunts insist that she speak in her mothertongue: 'When she reverts to English, she is scolded, "*¡En español!*"'. The more she practices, the sooner she'll be back into her native tongue' (p. 7). Thus she has forgotten the meaning of the word *antojo*, and it is no coincidence that this is precisely the word chosen to entitle the story. Here Álvarez emphasises Yolanda's situation as exile. Finally, when faced with the two peasants, Yolanda finds herself incapable of communicating in her mothertongue. Her linguistic paralysis ceases as soon as she acknowledges herself as North American, however: 'as if the admission itself loosens her tongue, she begins to speak, English, a few words, of apology at first, then a great flood of explanation' (p. 20). The conception of language as 'the only homeland' is a leitmotiv in Álvarez. Yet this notion is always tainted with irony. In 'Antojos', for instance, it is debunked by a young poet's innuendo that 'in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one's mother tongue' (p. 13), and his subsequent enquiry about the language Yolanda loves in. The question of language is of course essential to Yolanda as a writer. But if she writes and finds it easier to express herself in English, Yolanda never completely forgets her mother tongue, and Spanish words and interjections such as '*Ay*' constantly punctuate her language. Yet Yolanda is not the only character to whom the question of language is important. Her mother Laura, a truly native speaker of Spanish, comments in *¡Yo!*: 'To tell you the truth, the hardest thing coming to this country wasn't the winter that everyone had warned me about – it was the language' (p. 21).

Therefore nostalgia is not absent from Álvarez's 'Antojos', but it is always played down by irony. In another chapter of the novel, 'A Regular Revolution', it is no longer Yolanda but her younger sister Sofía who constructs the Dominican Republic as her home, as examined in chapter one. In 'The suitor', from *¡Yo!*, the gaze of the outsider, Dexter, on the island, counterbalances Yolanda's somewhat idyllic vision. The author thereby avoids the trap of idealisation, even when her protagonist does not. Thus, for instance, while Yolanda blames Dexter, a Southerner, for all the ills of slavery in the United States, the latter reflects: 'Only recently, he read about slave wages on sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic' (*¡Yo!*, p. 191). People like the de la Torre, Yolanda's maternal family, are of course the first beneficiaries of such exploitation. Similarly, Yolanda's uncle is running for

president in 'democratic elections which – [Dexter] heard on the plane – will be patrolled by tanks on the streets' (p. 198).

Here, too, there is a tension between the home to which Yolanda aspires, a Caribbean paradise constantly contrasting with the United States, and the actual Dominican Republic. She claims to Dexter 'This is my home', referring to the island, and Dexter notices that 'her English has already picked up the lilt of an accent' as she talks (p. 192). Upon which he muses:

She hasn't lived there for a quarter of a century. She works here [in the States], makes love here, has her friends here, pays her taxes here, will probably die here. [...] Still, when she talks about the D.R., she gets all dewy-eyed as if she were crocheting a little sweater and booties for that island, *as if she had given birth to it herself out of the womb of her memory* (*¡Yo!*, p. 193, emphasis added).

Álvarez shows that, although her protagonist is much more politically conscious than her relatives who stayed behind, she has indeed 'given birth' to a fantasised homeland 'out of the womb of her memory', not only because she idealises her native island, but, more importantly, because she clings to it as her homeland, whereas, if anything, her new home is the States. As Dexter puts it:

Yo is as American as apple pie. Well, let's say, as American as Taco Bell taco. She claims the litmus test is if you say Oh or Ay when you smash your finger with a hammer. There've been plenty of times when she's bumped into something going to the bathroom in his unfamiliar apartment in the middle of the night and let out a 'shit!' He wonders what that proves about her, if anything (*¡Yo!*, p. 194).

In 'The third husband', it is Doug who deconstructs Yolanda's mythical island. While she claims that her belief in spiritualism is part of her Caribbean cultural heritage, Doug reflects: 'to this day he has yet to hear one of her aristocratic old aunts talk about evil eyes or the spirits' (p. 260). This comment is indicative of how Yolanda's Dominicanness is indeed a construct which, as analysed in connection with 'Antojos', plays down the significance of racial and social inequalities in the Dominican Republic. What is implied here is that, had she been brought up on the island, Yolanda, given her social background, would certainly not have openly adhered to such Afro-Antillean beliefs, which are derided by the Eurocentric elite.

But perhaps Yolanda's construct is best unveiled by the gaze of an insider, her cousin Lucinda. Like her fellow countrymen, Lucinda does not consider Yolanda and her sisters Dominican: she calls them her *gringa* cousins. While Lucinda

recognises the racism, sexism, or class prejudices of Dominican society, as she comments: 'still, I spread my arms wide and gave myself to this island [upon her return from the States], which is more than the García girls ever did for their so-called homeland' (p. 36). She adds: 'They came every summer and were out of here by September. [...] it seemed right in keeping that they should make their exit just as hurricane season was about to start' (p. 36). Lucinda's bitter remarks are not devoid of lucidity: her cousins, especially Yolanda, get the best of both worlds: it is easy for them to claim their Dominicaness, without having to live up to the consequences. But if Álvarez reveals the falsity of their construct, she does not condemn her protagonists: being between two homes, two cultures and two languages, they have no choice but to invent their own identity.

Unlike *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, there are chapters in *¡Yo!* which do not focus on the García de la Torre family, but on average, humble Dominicans around them. This is the case in 'The maid's daughter', 'The stranger', 'The caretakers' and 'The night watchman'. The first two are stories of ordinary Dominican emigrants. If the first is a success story, in the second Ruth undergoes the hardships of illegal immigration: in order to obtain US citizenship, she marries an abusive man whom she cannot divorce. The picture that emerges from these chapters, notably the revelation of the harsh living conditions of ordinary Dominicans both at home and abroad, contrasts radically with the world of the de la Torres. This multiplicity of voices provides a more complex view of Dominican society and allows Álvarez to avoid idealisation.

Like Yolanda, Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's Rehvana invents her homeland in *L'autre qui danse*. Her creation is so divorced from reality, however, that instead of providing moral support, it becomes self-destructive. As analysed in the previous chapter, in the Parisian squat the Martiniquan Rehvana constructs her homeland as mythical Africa. The other members of the sect are, like her, unable to define themselves in a positive way. Their misguided notion of African authenticity, drives them to produce a myth of what they hold as Africanness. The reality is that they are diaspora Antilleans, 'négropolitains', with no first-hand knowledge of the Caribbean, unlike Rehvana herself: their very Creole is quirky. The Ébonis' alienation is clearly a product of their condition as double exiles, suffering an ancestral exile, from Africa, added to a more immediate one, from the Caribbean.

Yet other 'négropolitains' in the novel, like Jérémie, manage to elaborate a positive identity in exile. The explanation of Jérémie's success lies in his ability to come to terms with the various elements of his cultural heritage:

Jérémie est [...] ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler un négropolitain. [...] il ne voit les Antilles qu'à travers la cadence, Malavoi et Kassav, les accras de morue et le punch. Guadeloupe et Martinique ne représentent pour lui qu'un aimable folklore, dont il ne renie rien, mais il promène sans complexe et sans aigreur sa peau sombre [...] dans les rues de Paris (*L'Autre qui danse*, p. 30).

This position is in direct contrast with that of Rehvana and the Ébonis, whose search for origins is frustrated because they conceive their identity as atavic and exclusivist: theirs is a quest for the absolute, for purity, that is doomed to failure. Unlike Rehvana and the Ébonis, 'Jérémie, pour sa part, n'entend ni cliquettements de chaînes d'esclave ni la voix de l'Afrique' (p. 30). This ability to reconcile various elements is, as will be examined below, also the key to Matildana's constructive self-definition.

After fantasising about Africa in the first part of the novel, in the second part island-born but largely Paris-bred Rehvana proceeds to idealise Martinique. Like Yolanda, she gives birth to an imaginary native island. Because of her need to belong, a fake authenticity informs her conception of her identity, which in turn leads her to block out reality. She thus re-constructs a Martinique full of anachronistic customs, from living in a traditional house with no modern conveniences, to complying with the role of the typical housewife victimised by a violent, sexist and unfaithful companion. As Álvarez does with Yo, Dracius-Pinalie sets her protagonist's imaginary island against the real one, showing Rehvana to be at odds with her surroundings and in particular with her compatriots. Thus while Rehvana would insist on walking barefoot in the streets of Fort-de-France, so as to 'renouer avec une tradition de coupeuse de canne [...], de pauvre négresse bitako, de servante', the author mentions how cane-cutters, though too poor to own a pair of shoes, traditionally protected themselves with bandages: 'cependant les amarreuses des cannaies s'enveloppent les pieds et tout le corps de plusieurs épaisseurs de harde pour échapper aux morsures de la canne'. Similarly, the family cleaner wears high heels: 'pourtant la servante de sa mère arrive juchée sur des talons hauts de douze centimètres' (*L'autre qui danse*, p. 18). So the customs Rehvana is observing as tradition are a sham. Furthermore, here as in the case of Yolanda with respect to

Afro-Antillean beliefs, Dracius-Pinalie notes how Rehvana's construct overlooks the realities of class:

Mais Rehvana se voulait authentique, plus authentique que ceux qui ne sont jamais partis sur l'Autre Bord, et promenait insolemment ses jolis pieds fins de mulâtresse historique aux frères attaches aristocratiques sur le macadam incompréhensif de sa Fort-de-France natale et cependant étrangère (p. 18).

The friendship she establishes with her old neighbour Man Cidalise when she returns to Martinique only further encourages Rehvana's fanaticism. Indeed, besides belonging to another generation, Man Cidalise comes from an extremely humble, rural background. This accounts for her traditionalism, a traditionalism Rehvana is eager to take on, despite their differences in age, education, and class. Under Man Cidalise's influence, Rehvana readily conforms to obsolete practices, as if this alone could alter her present reality. When the protagonist voices complaints about Éric's abusive treatment, for instance, the old woman exhorts her to bear her lot in silence: 'Assez pleuré, je te dis: c'est pas la pluie pour mouiller Davila! Une grande fille comme toi, tu vas pas me dire que c'est deux ou trois calottes tu as reçues et puis tu sais même plus raidir ton corps!' (p. 133). She adds: 'Prends ta part, doudou, si c'est ta part, tu prends ta part...' (p. 135). Man Cidalise is also extremely superstitious. Through Man Cidalise's pernicious influence on the protagonist, the author denounces any uncritical acceptance of the rural, oral Creole culture, arguing that some of it must be discarded if Antilleans, especially women, are to construct a new identity free of alienation and compatible with modern times. Thus Rehvana's adoption of anachronic customs is fatal to her baby girl. When her sister Matildana advises her to feed Aganila with bottles to make up for her milk deficiency, Rehvana retorts: 'Chez nous, on a toujours eu de quoi nourrir nos enfants, tu devrais savoir ça! Je suis antillaise, j'ai du lait et j'allaites mon bébé' (p. 205). At the end of the novel, Aganila dies of malnutrition and cold. So in a twist of logic, the nurturing mother turns matricide.

Here Rehvana reverses the tenets of *négritude*: while the poets fuse the image of the traditional mother with that of the land of origins – Africa or the Caribbean – Rehvana comes to the absurd conclusion that following outdated customs will make her a traditional mother, which in turn will allow her to succeed in her quest for origins. Read retrospectively, this episode could be read as an allegory for the



perniciousness of the myth of Mother Africa: Rehvana would stand for the idealised mother continent, while Aganila would stand for her daughter, that is, Rehvana herself. Rather than sustaining her people and especially her daughters, then, the original mother country, when led by tradition, further alienates and eventually smothers them. And indeed, the novel shows how, in her fierce aspiration to belong, Rehvana ultimately meets her death. If it casts them into a fixed identity that overlooks the *détour* that occurred via the Middle Passage, pan-Africanism can be not only irrelevant, but also extremely harmful to Antilleans.

With the character of Matildana, the novel provides a foil to Rehvana. Unlike her sister, Matildana succeeds in her identity quest precisely because she is able to reconcile her Creole and French legacies. A Classics graduate from the Sorbonne, she goes on to study Creole linguistics in Martinique. Her ability to combine the study of Latin and Greek with that of Creole shows her willingness to accommodate the multiple facets of her cultural heritage, including French values, instead of singling out one part of it.<sup>16</sup> Rehvana's search for the absolute implies an unconditional, total acceptance of the culture she wishes to embrace. Yet because she identifies with one component of her cultural heritage to the exclusion of the others, her self-definition does not allow for an accurate representation of her syncretic cultural make-up. By contrast, Matildana values the various components of her multicultural heritage, but within each of them she selects the elements she wants to retain: 'Matildana ne fait ni une ni deux quand il s'agit de se régaler d'un migan de fruit à pain doux [...] Mais elle préfère franchement Mozart au tambour lancinant du gros ka; elle n'apprécie guère l'anarchie primitive des trempages, ni le folklore des larges feuilles de banane en guise d'assiettes...' (p. 324). Thus, unlike her sister's, Matildana's Creole identity is devoid of folklore: 'Il ne lui semble pas qu'être antillaise se réduise à avoir le palais, l'oreille, le "charmant babil" légendaire ou le déhanchement créole' (p. 325).

The very portrayal of Matildana as multiracial and polychromous reflects her approach to her construction of identity:

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<sup>16</sup> Matildana's attitude is actually more in keeping with *négritude* aesthetics – which usually allied the French, African, and sometimes Caribbean traditions – than Rehvana's radicalism. Césaire's poetry, for instance, dialogues with the French poetic canon – such as Baudelaire in the episode of the tramway in the *Cahier* – and the Surrealists, at the same time as it draws on an African symbol system (for example, the tree), and refers to Creole culture (for example, the particular meaning of 'debout'). Similarly, Senghor's writing combines African with Classic mythology.

grande fille saine aux pommettes saillantes de Caraïbes – ou de Viking –, inébranlablement campée, telle une porteuse de tray d'antan, sur le galbe mat de ses hautes jambes, bien dans sa peau étrangement polychrome – d'ébène ivoirienne tout au long de ses longues, interminables mains annelées aux longs ongles bombés, de cannelle suave sur ses bras, et de sapotille claire, satin abricoté, pour le visage (pp. 39-40).

The description successively draws on references to the Caribbean, Europe and Africa, thus reflecting the syncretic nature of Caribbean cultures. It is in keeping with Glissant's notion of rhizome identity, as opposed to root identity, and the opposition he draws between atavic and creolised civilisations. Matildana's approach in her self-definition is therefore much more representative of her identity as an Antillean than her sister's. The description indeed posits Matildana as Rehvana's antithesis: apart from being as tall and strong as her sister is small and frail, Matildana is also as confident and fulfilled as Rehvana is insecure and alienated. Her depiction as 'bien campée', recalls of course Césaire's 'debout' at the end of the *Cahier*, as well as Schwarz-Bart's Télumée standing in her garden. Thus here it is Caribbeanness, rather than pan-Africanism, which is envisaged as the emblematic posture of resistance and cultural affirmation for the Antilleans. Significantly, in another passage the author qualifies Matildana's shoulders as 'naturellement marronnes':

Matildana, les épaules fortes, vastes épaules aux minceurs vigoureuses, libres, naturellement marronnes, et fleurdelisées d'éphélides (oui, elle porte à l'épaule la fleur de lys de l'esclave convaincu de marronnage, elle fut marquée, non au fer rouge, mais d'une mélanine victorieuse dès avant sa naissance, en même temps qu'au creux de ses reins se dessinait la tache mongole de ceux-là qui s'aventurèrent des terres jaunes de l'Asie aux confins de la Terre sans nom, [America] (pp. 43-44).

As in the previous portrait, this description combines the various components of Caribbean cultures, forging an alliance between the African legacy (through the mention of *marronnage*), with those of France (the *fleur de lys* was the symbol of French royalty) and the Caribs.

Matildana's cultural heritage is presented as her real wealth: from it she derives the strength that brings her confidence. Thus, not only has her ancestry provided the protagonist with her physical appearance, but, more importantly, it has bequeathed her the cultural practices that allow her to overcome alienation and to come to terms with her complex identity. One such practice is the dance, 'cette suée voulue, qui lave et a toujours lavé les sanies de l'aliénation' (p. 73), discussed in the previous

chapter. Matildana did not learn this dance, she has always known it: 'un rituel inconnu, mais auquel il lui semble qu'elle s'est initiée sans grand-peine, il y a des lustres et des lustres, dans l'aisance de la danse et des mémoriaux pas...' (p. 74). It is her ability to retain such practices that have allowed Matildana to remain connected with her own self, even in exile: 'Elle sent bien, de toute façon, qu'elle n'a jamais cessé d'être antillaise, que ces innombrables années d'exil n'ont pas changé grand-chose à ce qu'elle est dans sa nature profonde' (p. 324). So this Creole heritage truly sustains Matildana. Rehvana's relation to her cultural heritage is diametrically opposite: significantly, she sells the traditional Creole jewelry inherited from her grandmother in order to fund the pan-Africanist sect (p. 51), thereby throwing away her real wealth (both literally and figuratively) so as to build fallacious dreams.

Despite its presentation by the author in unequivocally liberating terms, however, the protagonist's self-definition is fraught with ambiguity. Although extremely critical of Rehvana's position in relation to Africa and to the oral Creole culture of Martinique, Matildana herself seems little selective with regard to her French heritage. Thus she is shown to accept the nationalistic Marseillaise, which suggests that, unlike Glissant's concept, her *antillanité* has no political ramifications. This ambiguity is unsettling: it makes Matildana's response to her condition as an Antillean exile – that is, the full recognition of her interculturality – problematic. Indeed, despite the protagonist's rejection of Antillean folklore quoted above, apart from the slave dance whose psychological importance was discussed previously, her Creole culture seems therefore reduced to folklore, amounting to little more than charming but purely decorative practices regarding food, music, and Creole language.<sup>17</sup>

Because, unlike Yo, Matildana and Rehvana, she is cut off from her native island, Pilar, the main protagonist of Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

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<sup>17</sup> The Creole linguist Dany Bébel-Gisler's vision of the role Creole culture has to play in the future of the French Caribbean is radically different. As she sees it, there are '[des] liens indissociables entre l'économique, le culturel, le politique, dans leur articulation aux luttes de libération nationale' (*Le défi culturel guadeloupéen*, p. 27). She echoes Glissant when she links the linguistic to the economic: 'Défendre une langue, c'est en fait défendre un marché économique et symbolique', (p. 145).

experiences a greater dislocation in exile.<sup>18</sup> García's novel is dominated by the theme of separation:

Cuba is a peculiar exile [...]. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all (*Dreaming in Cuban*, p. 219).

Because of [the Cuban Revolution, Celia's] husband will be buried in stiff, foreign earth. Because of this, their children and their grandchildren are nomads (pp. 6-7).

The relatively small spatial separation between Cuba and the US is widened by the Cold War: the del Pino family is split by politics. While Celia is an unconditional supporter of the Revolution, her husband Jorge and their elder daughter Lourdes are fierce opponents who both emigrate to New York. The second daughter Felicia remains in Havana but shows little enthusiasm for the Revolution: instead, she resorts to *santería* as an escape. Only the son, Javier, who lives in Prague, shares Celia's political commitment. These political divergences are carried on to the next generation: unlike her mother Lourdes, New York-raised Pilar's allegiances lie with the Revolution, as underlined by the fact that she was born in the wake of the historical event. Her date of birth further connects Pilar to her grandmother, since on that day Celia also celebrated her fiftieth birthday. Felicia's children likewise divide between the twins Luz and Milagro, born in the week of the 1962 Missile Crisis and totally committed to the Revolution, and the more deviant Ivanito: 'Luz says that families are essentially political and that [Ivanito will] have to choose sides' (p. 86).

Thus Celia and the twins blindly adhere to revolutionary demagoguery, especially anti-US propaganda:

The *yanquis*, rumors go, have ringed the island with nuclear poison, hoping to starve the people and incite a counterrevolution. They will drop germ bombs to wither the sugarcane fields, blacken the rivers, blind horses and pigs (pp. 3-4).

On the other hand, Jorge and Lourdes espouse the extremist anti-Castro rhetoric of many Cuban exiles:

Everyday they grow more convinced that the dearth of bad news about Cuba is a conspiracy by the leftist media to keep international support for El Líder strong. Why can't the Americans see the Communists in their own backyards [...]? The Democrats are to blame, the Democrats and those lying, two-timing Kennedys. What America needs [...] is another Joe McCarthy to set things right again. *He* would not have abandoned them at the Bay of Pigs (p. 171).

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<sup>18</sup> Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*, New York: Ballantine, 1993 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1992).

Pilar is the one who 'dreams in Cuban' in the novel. She strives to maintain her Cuban identity alive through memory, regular letters to her grandmother, as well as by remaining connected to Cuban culture in New York (such as music and *santería* practices). She therefore attempts to bridge the political, historical and social divide on either side of the Florida Strait. Temporal and spatial distance give her a more balanced view of Cuba than that of her relatives with immediate experience of the Revolution. Without this distance, Pilar could not undertake such an enterprise, for everything about Cuba is politicised, down to the very choice between remaining on the island or leaving, even when the primary motives for such a choice may not be political. This Cold War framework makes spatial separation between islanders and the diaspora much more definitive for Cubans than in the case of other Caribbean nationals (except Haitians until the end of Duvalierism).

Tellingly named Pilar Puente, the protagonist is envisaged as the strong pillar that supports the bridge linking the Cuban community in the United States to the Cubans who remained on the island. As the novel shows, Pilar's is a multicultural heritage, not only because it reconciles the mainstream US, Cuban-American, and Cuban traditions, but also because Cuban culture itself is extremely diverse, having incorporated customs as varied as the Taino-Arawak, the Hispanic and the West African. The two sisters Lourdes and Felicia embody and polarise this syncretism in the novel: while the first drags her daughter to flamenco dance classes (p. 59), the second becomes increasingly involved with the rites of *santería*.

But certainly what Pilar wants most is to be re-united with the side of her family she has left behind, in particular her maternal grandmother, Celia. Thus she understands her connection to Cuba not so much in political terms, but essentially on a personal level. In fact, Celia has virtually substituted for the island in Pilar's memories. At the beginning of the novel, at thirteen, Pilar certainly does not feel at home in New York: 'Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. [...] If I could see Abuela Celia again, I'd know where I belong' (p. 58). Yet Celia perceives her as no longer Cuban, but foreign. She comments: 'Pilar, her first grandchild, writes to her from Brooklyn in a Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt. Pilar's eyes, Celia fears, are no longer used to the compacted light of the tropics, where a morning hour can fill a month of days in

the north [...]. She imagines her granddaughter pale, gliding through paleness, malnourished and cold without the food of scarlets and greens' (p. 7). Furthermore, Pilar is very Western in her behaviour and her outlook on life: 'Celia knows that Pilar wears overalls like a farmhand and paints canvases with knots and whorls of red that resemble nothing at all' (p. 7). Like Álvarez's Yolanda, Pilar thus occupies a space between two cultures, two languages and two countries, and at first she is torn by this double heritage.

Nevertheless, despite her need to reconnect with Cuba, unlike Rehvana or the Yolanda of the opening of 'Antojos' Pilar does not construct herself an idyllic homeland, and remains aware that she needs to see the realities of Cuba before she can choose: 'I'm not sure Cuba is [home], but I want to find out' (p. 58). She runs away from home in a frustrated attempt to reach the island. Eight years later, on her first visit to Cuba, Pilar realises that her home is in the United States: 'I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong – not *instead* of here, but *more* than here' (p. 236). So the mature Pilar no longer sees the two parts of her heritage as mutually exclusive, but as complementary. Her connection to the US only differs from her connection to Cuba in degree, not in essence.

In this respect Pilar's attitude is diametrically opposite to that of her mother. Lourdes fled Cuba in the early days of the Revolution after being raped by men of the revolutionary army who had come to seize her in-laws' ranch. Following this episode, Lourdes proceeds to obliterate the island and her past. Unlike most of Castro opponents within the first-generation of Cubans in the US, who frequently develop a nostalgia for a romanticised pre-Revolutionary Cuba, and for whom the island therefore never ceases to be a point of reference,<sup>19</sup> in exile Lourdes strives to situate herself outside Cuba: 'Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention. [...] She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her' (p. 73). Yet in parallel with this total rejection of the island itself, Lourdes develops a Manichean, over-simplistic notion of the political picture of Cuba and its

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<sup>19</sup> Ruth Behar notes how for first-generation Cuban immigrants to the US, 'Cuba represented nostalgia, a paradise lost, youthful dreams of social transformation gone sour' (*Bridges to Cuba*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 6).

relationship to the US. As Pilar comments, her 'views are strictly black-and-white' (p. 26). Lourdes's ideological extremism is such that it virtually prevents her from relating to the people back in Cuba. Thus on their visit to the island, Pilar reflects on Lourdes: 'the language she speaks is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely' (p. 221). So Lourdes has severed the ties with the homeland, and the novel implies that this is the root of her alienation, manifested in her bulimia. Yet as it transpires from the way she deals with her daughter – particularly regarding issues such as female sexuality –, or the way she treats Puerto Ricans – whom she considers inferior to Cuban exiles –, or her extreme position on Cuban political matters, in reality Lourdes cannot totally escape her Cubanness.

On the other hand, Celia, who in 1935 used to feel like 'a prisoner on the island' (p. 49), manages to find a new sense of identity within the Revolution. So social change is an alternative to exile for Caribbean women. By contrasting Pilar and Lourdes, and then Lourdes with Celia, García seems to imply that being Cuban does not entail taking on narrow definitions imposed by Cold War politics, that it is not a matter of those who stayed as opposed to those who left. She stresses the importance of reconciliation, of re-opening the dialogue, not simply between Cubans on the island and the diaspora, but also between supporters of the Revolution and dissidents, whether within or outside the island, so as to reconstitute one people, rather than two factions opposed by ideology. Only then, García seems to suggest, will the Cubans as a people and nation survive the Cold War, and, more importantly in a contemporary context, the economic crisis of the Special Period. Ruth Behar likewise points to the need to 'go beyond the polarizations of Cold War thinking' (*Bridges to Cuba*, p. 4). In this matter second-generation exiles as well as the second generation of the Revolution (represented by Pilar and Ivanito in the novel) have a crucial role to play, since their distance from ideological fanaticism enables them to bridge the gap. The author, a second-generation exile herself, clearly sees her role as that of encouraging reconciliation: with *Dreaming in Cuban* she tries to transcend political divisions. Thus the wide range of ideological stances adopted by the characters in the novel allows García to avoid oversimplifying the situation of post-1959 Cuba. The insertion of Celia's letters, written between 1935 and 1959 and attesting to the corruption and social injustice under Machado and Batista, also enables the author to examine the motives for the Revolution, and provide a balanced view of pre-revolutionary Cuba. Like Álvarez, through polyphony García

evades the trap of idealisation deceptively suggested by the title and so common among many Cuban exiles.

So Pilar manages to transcend the ideological divergences intertwined with her interculturality. Despite her gradual realisation that dissent is not tolerated in Cuba, which in part motivates her to choose the adoptive country as her home and to assist Ivanito's escape to the US during the Mariel exodus at the end of the novel, Pilar never ceases to situate herself as both Cuban and a US citizen. She thereby fully assumes her interculturality, perhaps more successfully than Álvarez's Yo. In fact, if Pilar's decision to return to the US is partly political, it is also to a large extent personal: whereas on her visit Pilar becomes aware of the full political implications of the Revolution for those who live it daily, she also realises that there remain important shortcomings of Cuban society which the Revolution did not eradicate, such as sexism. Although less so than in Álvarez, the text is emphatic on masculine marital infidelity, and it highlights the fact that despite the opportunity for women to become guerrilla lieutenants, by and large, as Herminia puts it, 'the men are still in charge' (p. 185). It is hardly surprising, then, that Pilar should opt for the same solution as Yo in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*.

Like Pilar and Matildana, Edwidge Danticat's Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) avoids idealising the remote homeland. If initially Sophie's account of her life in a small provincial town of Haiti with her aunt Atie has a strong ring of paradise lost, midway through Part One she abruptly awakens to the sour reality of the country. She discovers the extent of the social and political unrest that riddles Haiti, as on her way to New York she witnesses a riot near the airport, and once on the plane hears that her travelling companion's father, a corrupt politician, has just been killed in the riot. Atie's apocalyptic comment: 'Maybe the world, it is ending' (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, p. 34), as well as the taxi driver's remark: 'There could be some more chaos [...] I want to go before things become very bad' (p. 35), both suggest to Sophie that perhaps the world she is leaving behind was not so much of a paradise after all. This is certainly what Atie wants her to realise when she tells her: 'Do you see what you are leaving?' (p. 34). Sophie soon discovers that violence is part of everyday life in Haiti, as on her arrival in New York her mother Martine discloses the mystery surrounding her birth: Sophie was conceived following a rape by a Macoute, a version sharply contrasting with Atie's story of a little girl born out



of rose petals. This episode concludes Part One. Thus, in contrast to conventional childhood novels, Sophie soon realises that her homeland is no paradise. Of course, she longs for it, for the life she led previously, her lost innocence. Most of all, however, just as Pilar longs for Celia, Sophie longs for Atie.

Sophie's coming to awareness of the realities of Haiti is certainly more sour than that of Pilar or Yo, and her experience as an exile in the US is also more painful. Sophie encounters greater difficulties in adapting to the adoptive country, firstly because she comes as a young adolescent, while her Dominican and Cuban counterparts came as very young children. But most of all what makes Sophie's sense of dislocation greater is that, if like Yolanda, Matildana and Pilar, Sophie is between two homes and two cultures, in addition she finds herself between three rather than just two languages (Creole, French and English). The sharp divide in Haiti between a popular, primarily rural, Creolophone sector of the population representing over eighty percent of the people, and a Francophile, urban elite thus further contributes to Sophie's sense of dislocation, since although of humble, rural and Creole-speaking background, once in New York her mother Martine emulates the values of the French-speaking upper classes, as will be examined later. On the emotional level, Sophie is also torn between two mothers: her aunt Atie, her surrogate mother until she is twelve, and Martine, her biological mother. The episode on which the novel opens, where Atie asks Sophie to save her hand-made Mother's Day card for her real mother, whom she is to meet in New York shortly (p. 8), is indicative of how this doubling of the maternal figure is unsettling to Sophie. Sophie's sense of dislocation brought about by exile is also greatly heightened by the difference in social status and race: while the Dominican and Cuban protagonists belong to white-Hispanic, middle-class communities in the US, Sophie, much more so than the García girls or Pilar, is a victim of class prejudices and racial discrimination. Part Two recounts the hardships undergone by many Haitian emigrants, and their difficulties in integrating into the new land. The realities of emigration have replaced the American dream, epitomised in the promise everyone in Haiti makes Sophie: 'once [she] got there, [she] would love it so much that [she] would beg [her] mother to let [her] stay' (p. 17). Instead, on seeing her mother, Sophie notes how she has aged and how tired she looks. She reflects: 'Her fingers were scarred and sunburned. It was as if she had never stopped working in

the cane fields after all' (p. 42). She also comments on the reception afforded to many Haitians in the US:

Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they had heard on television that only the 'Four Hs' got AIDS – Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians.

I wanted to tell my mother that I didn't want to go to school. Frankly, I was afraid (p. 51).

Compared with Yo's and Pilar's, Sophie's experience is all the harsher in that she enjoys none of the greater freedom that the more permissive US society could offer: Martine watches her closely and sends her to a French-speaking, Catholic school. Her world is restricted to a circle of Haitian exiles, many of whom are actually quite reactionary. Thus Marc's insistence on reciting his full name, Marc Jolibois Francis Legrand Moravien Chevalier, when introducing himself, is indicative of the extent to which he remains attached to the privileges of his class, and of how exile has done little to alter his conservatism. This also applies to his views regarding gender roles: although he urges Sophie to get a good career, Marc nonetheless appears to regard chastity and culinary talents (in particular an expertise in traditional Haitian cuisine) as a woman's chief virtues: 'Marc is one of those men who will never recover from not eating his *manman*'s cooking. [...] If he could get her out of her grave to make him dinner, he would do it' (p. 53). Especially revealing is the scene where Haitian exiles discuss the fate of the country (pp. 54-55). The argument that arises exposes the diverging interests of the members of the community, and, more crucially, their inability to overcome the counterproductive rivalries that have hindered the development of Haiti ever since independence. Thus, for instance, exile has not altered the elite's contempt for the masses, as illustrated in the discussion about the boat people. So the author is quite critical of the exile community, especially of those issued from the Haitian elite.

Thanks to Martine's strict upbringing, Sophie can summarise her life growing up in New York in three words: "School, home and prayer". She is not allowed to have any boyfriend until she turns eighteen. When she finally does and begins a relationship with Joseph, Martine submits her to the practice of *tests*. So for Sophie the experience of exile is certainly more grim than for Yo and Pilar, and she finds it harder to come to terms with her interculturality. Nevertheless, exile does provide a degree of freedom, compared to the rigid social organisation of Haiti. As Martine

comments, for instance: 'in Haiti if your mother was a coal seller and you became a doctor, people would still look down on you knowing where you came from. But in America, they like success stories' (p. 80).

Sophie faces the realities of Haiti when she goes back as an adult in Part Three. The image of contemporary Haiti that emerges from the text is largely the result, as in Pilar's case, of an increased awareness conferred by growing up and Sophie's condition as exile: hers is now a critical, outsider's gaze. Coming back to Haiti, Marc likewise becomes aware of the indigence of the people, while as a privileged insider he was blind to it. One of Sophie's main realisations on her visit is that Haitian society is oppressive to women: the practice of *tests* and the obsession with virginity are not simply characteristic of her mother, but customs observed widely in rural Haiti. Together with this strict control of female sexuality comes an oppressive female socialisation, which leaves Haitian women no room for self-fulfilment, as expressed by Atie's wish for an extra two fingers quoted in chapter one (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, p. 151).

So only when she goes back to Haiti is Sophie able to evaluate the extent of the freedom she has acquired by leaving home and marrying Joseph. And here again, Sophie chooses to remain in the US. Her realisation of the hardships undergone by Haitians, and particularly Haitian women, however, does not bring about hatred for the homeland in Sophie. On the contrary, on her return she begins to refer to Haiti, rather than her mother's place, as 'home' (p. 195). Like Pilar, then, Sophie can reconcile her native land with her adoptive country, choosing the latter, but keeping the heritage of the former, 'I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head' (p. 243).<sup>20</sup>

Martine's attitude contrasts with that of Sophie, and her relationship to the homeland is ambiguous. If in New York she clings to her Haitian identity – only mixing with Haitian exiles, continuing to eat Haitian food, bringing Sophie up

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<sup>20</sup> With the lucidity of Sophie, Matildana, and Pilar, Paule Marshall's Ursa opts for the same solution, and for the same reasons, at the end of *Daughters* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992, 1<sup>st</sup> US edition 1991). This ending also echoes that of Marshall's first novel *Brown Girl Brownstones* (London: Virago Press, 1989, 1<sup>st</sup> US edition 1959). In the closing scene the protagonist, New York-born but of Barbadian descent like the author, throws away one of the two bangles she has inherited from her grandmother, thus symbolically retaining part of her Caribbean heritage, while adopting the United States as her home. Similarly, when Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John decides to leave Antigua at the end of the novel, she takes her trunk, a symbol for her Caribbean heritage. This is also the solution Álvarez's Yo opts for, although in her case it is the abrupt confrontation between fantasy and reality that forces her to reach such a decision.

according to Haitian principles of female socialisation, and sending her to a French-speaking school – in Haiti she is nonetheless a US citizen, and very aware of the privileges attached to this new political status and economic position. Thus Sophie reflects on her arrival: ‘When I first caught a glimpse of her, she was sitting on the back of a cart pulled by two teenage boys’ (p. 158). And as they are leaving Haiti: ‘My mother had no trouble at the [airport] reservation desk. Our American passports worked in our favor. She bribed the ticket seller twenty dollars to change us into seats next to one another’ (p. 178). At the same time, despite adhering to an old, out-of-date conception of her cultural identity, after her first and only brief visit Martine expresses her wish never to return to Haiti alive. As discussed in the previous chapter, she also rejects the part of her Haitianess that would actually connect her most strongly to the rural, lower-class, Creolophone and black Haiti she grew up in. Instead, once in New York Martine proudly associates with upper and middle-class mulattoes like Marc. Furthermore, she is determined to convert her daughter into a middle-class professional, even when this implies self-denial, or the denial of her origins. Thus her answerphone message in French and English is meant to cover up her humble, rural background. But certainly where her alienation is most visible, is in Martine’s use of bleaching creams to lighten her skin. So Martine’s cultural identity is, here again, a selective construct, similar to those elaborated by Yo and Rehvana. Where Álvarez’s and Dracius-Pinalie’s protagonists denied their upper-class background to embrace elements of popular Afro-Caribbean culture, Martine rejects her humble origins to identify with upper-class, mulatto Haitian values. Quite unlike Yo and in a mechanism recalling the experience of Rehvana, though, Martine constructs for herself an identity that does not turn out nurturing and comforting, but destabilising and alienating: she eventually drifts into madness and ends up committing suicide. Martine thus fails to reconcile her double heritage as a Haitian exile: she is unable to create herself a space within which to evolve freely and find self-fulfilment.

Sophie, on the contrary, succeeds in making the most of her interculturality. Unlike Martine she remains close to her Creolophone Haitian roots, which is what allows her to connect with the black cultures of the US, especially with Joseph, a Louisiana-born jazz musician who allies both the French Creole and the Deep South cultures of the US. So whereas her mother confines herself to the Haitian community, Sophie is able to branch out. Paradoxically, while ostensibly she

distances herself from Haitian exiles (both literally, since she moves to Providence, and figuratively, since by marrying Joseph she frustrates her mother's hopes of marrying her to a Haitian exile), in fact Sophie reconnects with her Haitian heritage, particularly with her popular cultural roots, much more so than Martine. Keeping her distance allows Sophie to understand Haiti, rather than condemn and reject it: in this respect too, her position is diametrically opposed to that of her mother.

Martine's interculturality is sterile, while Sophie succeeds in turning it to her advantage. Unlike her mother who does not question Haitian traditions that are particularly harmful and restrictive for women, Sophie selects what she wants to retain of her Haitianness. Her approach to her Creole heritage is comparable to that of Matildana. In the United States, Sophie rebels against the generations-old practice of *tests*, and breaks free from the oppressive upbringing passed on from mother to daughter in her family. In exile she is able to become who she wants to be, and not who her mother wants her to be. Martine's uncritical acceptance of Haitian customs, on the other hand, is what makes it impossible for her to cope with her Haitian heritage, an inability expressed in her fear of returning to the island. On her only visit back to Haiti, she feels intense discomfort and has to leave within three days. She wishes only to return dead, to be buried. Therefore, while unlike Lourdes, who fiercely rejects her Cubanness, Martine does not deny her interculturality, she is ultimately crushed by it.

Myriam Chancy identifies four characteristics of the work of Caribbean diaspora women: alienation, the recuperation of the Caribbean heritage, self-definition and return.<sup>21</sup> If return is to be understood as temporary or even only mental, then these four elements are all present in the texts examined above. For Yo, the response to the alienation brought about by exile is a mental return, a self-definition that proves much more rewarding than her actual attempt to settle on the island. To survive the alienating experience of exile, Matildana resorts to comforting and empowering practices derived from her Creole heritage, while at the same time adapting this heritage to her needs; by remaining connected, she also guarantees her eventual return. Rehvana's return, on the other hand, is frustrated by her inability to

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<sup>21</sup> In *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997, pp. xxi-xxii.

undertake a meaningful self-definition that would counter the dislocation brought about by exile and a complex Caribbean identity. The success of Pilar's and Sophie's temporary physical returns is ensured by their indissoluble bond to the homeland through dreams, memories, and love, a bond their mothers Lourdes and Martine are unable to maintain. So whereas Yo's self-definition mostly consists of creating an enabling identity that allows her to cope with exile, Pilar, Sophie and Matildana go further: for them, self-definition involves shaping a new cultural identity to which they can resort when facing both the realities of the homeland and the displacement of exile.

### **The diaspora: a redefinition of female Caribbeanness?**

Exile necessarily brings about some cultural adjustment, an adaptation process that leads to a redefinition of identity. This is what Condé demonstrates in *Desirada* (1997), where island-born but metropolitan-bred Marie-Noëlle returns to a mystical Guadeloupe in search of her past and origins, only to discover that there, she is no longer considered as 'one of theirs':

Comme cela, elle était venue à la recherche de sa famille? (Il riait.) A la recherche de son identité? (Il riait plus fort.) L'identité, ce n'est pas un vêtement égaré que l'on retrouve et que l'on endosse avec plus ou moins de grâce. Elle pourrait faire ce qu'elle voulait, elle ne serait plus jamais une vraie Guadeloupéenne.

Marie-Noëlle finally realises that many people are, like her, exiles. People in the diaspora generate a new culture, which enriches the Caribbean culture. As Condé puts it:

L'identité guadeloupéenne a changé. Avant, les gens restaient là, maintenant on trouve des Antillais partout, et ils éprouvent des difficultés à se définir par rapport à leur culture d'origine. Ils génèrent, en fait, une culture nouvelle. Par conséquent, la plupart des Antillais qui sont reconnus internationalement vivent ailleurs, ils ont subi d'autres influences, et il serait dommage de ne pas tenir compte de cette créativité.<sup>22</sup>

For women in particular, exile often permits a self-fulfilment (whether personal or professional) otherwise impossible to achieve in small, traditional, sexist societies like those of the Caribbean. While Matildana chooses to return to the island, the experience of exile has clearly given her the resources to construct her identity as

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<sup>22</sup> Interview by Pierre Maury, *Le Soir* (Brussels), 17 September 1997, p. 6.

Antillean. She feels at ease both in France and in Martinique, with French and Creole, with the French and Caribbean cultures. Her success is based on her rejection of fake constructions and her ability to select from each heritage what best suits her personal growth, a process made possible by the distance conferred by exile. Among all the other female characters in the fiction by the authors discussed here, only Cristina García's Celia manages to reach self-fulfilment at home. The rest of the protagonists need to escape the homeland to find a positive sense of identity, and some fail in their enterprise. Seeking to forget the trauma of rape, García's Lourdes and Danticat's Martine are both eager to sever the cultural ties that link them to the native land. Thus, their exile is a bid for freedom. They suffer from not being able to draw on the homeland for spiritual comfort. In the case of Martine, her respite is merely temporary, and ultimately death is her sole escape. For Rehvana, on the other hand, it is the return home that is a flight, and this proves just as harmful as exile for Martine. By contrast, for Yo, Pilar and Sophie, remaining connected with the homeland in exile is fortifying: by claiming a relationship to both the homeland and the new country, they are able to create a new living space for themselves, to achieve self-definition, selecting among their cultural inheritance the aspects they wish to preserve and rejecting those they find burdensome. Thus for them, as for Matildana who remains on the island but carves herself a space between home and abroad that she can freely inhabit, exile is liberating.

### Conclusion: A new direction for Caribbean women's writing

As this study hopes to have established, many theories and issues around Caribbean cultural identity and literature evoke multiple resonances in the Francophone and Hispanic (as well as Anglophone) areas. A Jacques Stephen Alexis, for instance, could thus find Alejo Carpentier's notion of marvellous realism applicable to a Haitian context. In fact, despite deriving from previous observations on Cuba, collected in the early novel *¡Ecué-Yamba-O!*, it was in relation to Haiti that this concept was first clearly formulated by Carpentier.<sup>1</sup> The introduction outlined the parallels in the evolution of the Francophone and Hispanic identity discourses, and pointed to a significant difference in the formulation of pan-Africanism due to the varying ethnic composition in each linguistic area. While *négritude* and to a lesser extent *indigénisme* emphasised the African element of Caribbean cultural identity, the movements of *negrismo* and *afrocubanismo*, while of course engaging with a re-appraisal of the African legacy, preferred to stress the multiethnic, syncretic nature of the cultures of the region, putting forward the notion of hybridity. This concept was endorsed by the subsequent identity discourses of Caribbeanness and Creolisation in both linguistic areas, and remains central today.

Subsequent chapters further evidenced the convergences between the literary traditions of the two linguistic zones. Notably, chapter one compared the early works of Césaire and those of Guillén in their views of women as the coloniser's

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<sup>1</sup> *¡Ecué-Yamba-O! Novela afrocubana*, 1933, rpt. by Editorial Arte y Literatura, Havana, 1977.



accomplices; chapter two underlined the resonances between Carpentier's, Glissant's and Walcott's conception of history and the role they believe the writer is to play in the elaboration of a new Caribbean historiography, as well as the similarities in the writing of Marqués and Glissant, who (together with Lamming) regard women as defenders of the colonial status quo; chapter three brought to light the numerous correspondences between the writing of Pedreira, Fanon, Glissant and Luis Rafael Sánchez on the linguistic manifestation of the alienation of the colonised, while chapter four explored the correspondences between Marqués's and Fanon's theories on the misguided violence of the colonised; finally, chapter five showed the similarities in the experiences of exile for women of both the Francophone and Hispanic Caribbean diaspora.

Without denying the numerous specificities inherited from a shared colonial master that remain within each linguistic zone, this study thus hopes to have illustrated that a distinction between the (nominally) independent nations of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic on the one hand, and the neo-colonial territories of Puerto Rico, Guadeloupe and Martinique on the other, can be in many cases more relevant than a division of the region according to linguistic areas. This is especially true when dealing with issues of nationalism, as in chapter two; yet chapter three has demonstrated that this approach can also be adopted in other areas such as linguistic practices. What this study wants to suggest is that it is fruitful to explore Caribbean literature and culture from both angles, not only *within* but also *across* linguistic borders. At a time when the region is struggling to achieve some political and economic unity in the face of the neo-colonialist policies of the US and some European countries such as France and the Netherlands, a pan-Caribbean approach seems particularly vital.<sup>2</sup> Further still, it seems a more adequate reflection of the way in which the peoples of the Caribbean have conceived the archipelago, and thereby elaborated their own notion of regional identity: the linguistic barrier, after all, has never been an obstacle for large-scale migration, especially in the Greater Antilles.

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<sup>2</sup> The latest illustration of this desire for unity is the frustrated attempt of Dominica to enter the euro zone in January 2002. While this could be seen as a centrifugal move, a step away from the Caribbean towards Europe, this decision can also be interpreted as a recognition of the importance of the links (economic and otherwise) between Dominica and its Francophone neighbours. As such, it would therefore at once reflect the significance and encourage the development of the ties between the Anglophone and Francophone Windward islands.

When applied to women's writing in particular, a pan-Caribbean critical approach seems even more justified. Firstly, because the sexism found across Caribbean societies and letters has resulted in the marginalisation of women writers. Consequently, up to well into the 1980s, their voices remained isolated within their respective literary traditions: in view of the commonalities between Caribbean societies, it thus seems sensible to examine these early female voices, as well as those that emerged later, across languages. Secondly, because the numerous correspondences in the writing of the archipelago are strengthened in women's fiction by the common denominator of gender, by the common aim (albeit varied and unsystematic) of challenging and disrupting male-dominated and androcentric literary practices.

Women have been actively participating in the ongoing renovation of Caribbean writing. In fact, their irruption into the literary arena since the 1980s has been a, if not *the* major renovating force of Caribbean writing over the past two decades. Because the dominant regional literary discourses and tropes, even when they aspired to universality, were so evidently male-centred that they did not allow for the full inclusion of female *personae* and authors, women writers have traditionally adopted a more critical stance, challenging or distancing themselves from many mainstream assumptions regarding identity, nationalism, national culture and Caribbeanness, showing how these are often inadequate or restrictive for women. They have thus developed an innate suspicion of monolithic theories (to paraphrase Dash in *The Other America*, p. 109). This is often reflected in a marked preference for discourses (on identity, history, language and culture, Caribbeanness, among others) that allow for the inclusion of relativity, as opposed to the absolute, an attraction to discourses that value and reflect the multiplicity and complexity of Caribbean societies and their inhabitants, when many male theoreticians tend to favour unicity and choose to play down the differences (be they based on gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class or other), usually in the name of a nationalist cause defined in limiting terms.

Thus, as this study demonstrated, the notion of hybridity – whether ethnic and/or cultural, or even stylistic – is central to the women writers examined here. It forms the basis of the linguistic practices of several of them, as discussed in chapter three in relation to Mayra Santos, Sylviane Telchid, Gisèle Pineau and Ana Luz García Calzada. With the discussion of the latter, where hybridity is more stylistic than

linguistic, it became evident that the advocacy for hybridity is often coupled with an advocacy for what Glissant calls *opacité*, the non-definite, which leads in turn to the notion of the non-fixed and non-absolute. All the women writers discussed here, whether in the island or in the diaspora, have endorsed hybridity as an identity discourse, as emerged from chapter three and from the reading of Dracius-Pinalie, Fernández de Juan, Rojas, Telchid, Álvarez, García, and Danticat carried out in chapters four and five. Furthermore, most have adopted hybridity and its corollary, relativity, as an ideological position. This is manifested in their refusal to portray Caribbean societies and the past in Manichean terms, as examined in chapters one and two. So although all these authors, including those based abroad, are obviously profoundly attached to their homeland and draw on it for literary creativity, they resist idealisation: instead, they revisit the past and present of their countries to expose social evils such as incest, rape, racism and alienation, and to question the notions of heroism and even nationalism.

These authors, together with many of their precursors, are therefore determined to resist total systems of explanation. Thus, despite endorsing the concepts of hybridity and Creoleness, many continue to show reservations towards the most recent and more inclusive, flexible discourses, as evidenced in the Francophone area in their criticism of the *créolité* movement, or in their call in both areas for the need to re-envision the notion of diaspora and the way it relates to the archipelago, which is in fact an invitation to re-examine the very notion of identity. Challenging the scant acknowledgement of the role played by the diaspora in the shaping of the archipelago also involves questioning the nature of the Caribbean literary corpus. The authors discussed here have therefore called for a redefinition of Caribbeanness and Caribbean literature.

The evolution of identity discourse from pan-Africanism to pan-Caribbeanism and Creolisation has facilitated the inclusion of regional writers formerly excluded from the literary canon on the grounds of their ethnicity. It has thus helped in dismantling racial dichotomies. The emergence of diaspora writing is now likewise resolving the dialectics of home/abroad, the island/the West. Hopefully, over the next decade or two the influence of Caribbean women's writing on the local literary canon and ideologies will make it possible to go beyond gender oppositions. This is not yet a reality, because the conditions for women and women writers in the Caribbean remain very different from those of their male counterparts, as this study

hopes to have demonstrated. Yet women's fiction increasingly aspires to a transcendence of gender dichotomies, which suggests a weakening of the sexist order in the Caribbean. In this respect it would be interesting to read women alongside gay writers, and to contrast and compare their views on the issues of gender, sexuality and the notion of Caribbean identity in relation to the dominant discourses in the region.

So androgyny, or the disappearance of a sharp division between a 'masculinist' and a 'womanist' literary tradition, will be the ultimate success for women writers. This can seem paradoxical, because androgyny somehow means the death of women's writing. Twenty to thirty years ago, the works of a Luis Rafael Sánchez, a Daniel Maximin, or a Pedro Vergés were exceptional within the Caribbean canon for their balance of male and female voices and their challenge to phallocentrism. Now the phenomenon of androgynous writing is more and more frequent, as attested by the fiction of Mayra Santos and other promising authors such as Yanick Lahens, Aurora Arias, Anna Lidia Vega Serova, and Ena Lucía Portela. Even in the Francophone area, whose letters remain the most male-centred, Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* or Ernest Pépin's *Tango de la haine*, for instance, seem to indicate a similar progression. If it signals an increasing awareness of the unbalanced relationship between sexes in the Caribbean and a first step towards redressing this situation, such an evolution is of the utmost importance. For the time being, however, the persistence of gender inequalities in the Caribbean should not be minimised. We can hope women's writing, even when it gets fuller recognition and integration, will retain its ability to distance itself from the canon, and thus continue to act as a major renovating force.

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